

A Promised Healing

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at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.
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Isaiah 30:26

Moreover the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD binds up the bruise of His people and heals the stroke of their wound.

Over the years I have come to believe that although revival is needed most are not ready for it. The fact that they are not ready for it is proof that it is needed all the more, but it will not come until the preparation of the heart has been made. They are not ready for it because they are too strong, too strong in their own imagination. They see themselves as being strong, skillful, and sufficient, and for this reason revival does not come.

If you remember, a few weeks ago I said revival means a resuscitation of the life of God in us. The life is there but much like a drowning victim, they're still alive but the victim has taken on so much water that they need to be resuscitated, revived. Revival means there is something there to rekindle and renew. However, the need for revival means the conditions are very dire and dangerous.

Revival means I need something that I do not possess. The problem is we believe we possess everything necessary. I know very well the promises of God that say we possess all there is to life and godliness, and I'm thankful for those promises, but the things necessary for life and godliness do not reside in me and my personality, gifts or strengths, they are the very person and nature of God in us.

What I need is God's influence. This is the Christian life, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." As long as I see myself capable, skillful, and sufficient, revival will tarry.

In spite of all the evidence to the contrary, we still believe in ourselves and hence no revival. Oh how great it's needed right now. The state of our nation, our countrymen, our generation, rests not in the hands of politicians but in the hands of we, God's people. He did not call presidents

and members of Congress to be the salt and light of a people; He called His followers, His sons and daughters, the church, to be so. If that's not a sufficient need for revival of God's people, I do not know what else is.

Our children are being stolen from us. They're not just physically abducted but spiritually ripped from our arms and our hearts by an enemy who cares nothing for them. If there is a need for revival it's for our children's sake. But in spite of the evidence we believe we've got things under control. Maybe we aren't doing so well but at least we aren't doing as terribly bad as somebody else is.

If we are to experience revival here there must be an acknowledgement of our own sin.

No more, my God, I boast no more
Of all the duties I have done;
I quit the hopes I held before,
To trust the merits of Thy Son.

There is where revival comes. When you no longer trust in yourself but you place all of your confidence in Jesus Christ. But as bad as thinking yourself sufficient there is one thing worse—to know you are insufficient but not care about it. I don't mean you care nothing for revival, you do. You don't want your faith getting old and your heart cold. You want the spark renewed in your heart, you want revival, but you are content to live without it. You don't care enough to pursue the Lord God Himself. This is not a biblical contentment; it's an unholy kind of contentment. It is a form of worldliness. To know you need more of God's influence and power in your life but you don't care enough to get on your face before God and seek Him for it is worldliness at its most dangerous point.

We have a false definition of what it means to be worldly. We think of the person who is helter-skelter and doesn't care about consequences, he lives life in the moment, does whatever he wants to do. He drinks, parties and revels in his sins and his flesh. He never says no to any desire.

Or perhaps we think of a worldly person as somebody who is pursuing the pleasures of this world. But you say, "I'm not pursuing the entertainments of this world; I want more of God." But, my friend, if you're not pursuing the things of God I accuse you of being worldly. Here's why:

Worldliness = a spirit or attitude that does not care for the things of God.

Listen to what the Apostle John says in his first epistle:

“Love not the world nor the things of the world. He who loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

John contrasts loving the world and loving God, pursuing the world and pursuing God. Therefore, if you're not pursuing God you don't care about the things of God. That's what worldliness is—it has no concern for the things of God. Do you really care about the kingdom of God and the renown of Jesus Christ? If you are not moved enough to pursue them, then you are worldly.

Well then, this leads me to direct your attention to why the Lord God would inflict a blow upon us that would break us

I. WHY GOD WOULD BREAK US

“... in the day when the Lord binds up the brokenness of his people, and heals the wounds inflicted by his blow.”(Isaiah 30:26 ESV)

The word *bruise* here doesn't mean a black and blue spot on the skin, but here it means *brokenness* or *fracture*. God is portraying Himself as a physician. He takes a broken arm and sets it, then wraps a sling around it to bear it up. This is the concept behind this verse.

This is speaking of the wounds God inflicted. But why would He afflict His people?

I'm thankful I can say my God will break me. I have already dealt with this question but let me touch upon it briefly.

The reason God has to break us is because we are so often lifted up in pride and see ourselves as capable and sufficient to deal with our sins. We believe ourselves capable to deal with the areas of our lives we know unpleasing to God. We think ourselves sufficient to live the Christian life, to do what God requires, to fulfill the will of God. Therefore, God has to bring failure and hurt and pain into our lives until we come to the recognition that we don't have control and that it

is beyond our abilities.

Yes, God will wound you and me. In fact, I would say to you, the last twenty years of my life has been nothing more than a breaking. *You must be really hard, you say.* I hate to even tell you how hard. I look back on the person that I was just twenty years ago and I find myself thoroughly disgusted and ashamed. I thought God and I could do it and my emphasis was more on me than God. Yes, God did many things, but a lot of things I did in the power of my own intellect, thinking this is the way we go about the kingdom of God.

But God in His faithfulness took His rod and struck me hard and He's had to do so time and time again to drive out the arrogance, pride and self-sufficiency. I'm convinced that's what this season of our lives has been about. Its purpose is to sand us, strip us, and strike us until we say *God, I am not sufficient for these things!*

Another reason God brings the blows, breaks and fractures is to awaken us to our true spiritual state. We're asleep. When you're asleep you don't know what's around you. You're not aware of your own environment. Somebody can be in the home quietly maneuvering and stealing things, maybe even moving to threaten someone in your household and you can lie there and not know anything about it. That's what sleep does.

And that's what pride will do. It's like an anesthesia, it will put you right out and you're not aware of your true spiritual condition. You can say *I want God* but you put no effort in because you're fast asleep and don't even know it. So God startles us, He stirs us to expose us to realize all is not well.

The why He does this is for the following reason:

II. SPIRITUAL VITALITY COMES OUT OF WEAKNESS AND NOT STRENGTH

It's just the opposite of what we think. Our way to overcome our sin is to try and try again to gain strength over it. God's method is to weaken us. We mourn over our weakness, thinking that if only we were stronger, if we had more spiritual power, we would have victory, we could overcome, we could do more for God. It would seem reasonable to assume that failure to lead a holy life is due to our powerlessness. The obvious answer is to get some more power. We need

something we don't have. But this assumption leads to a wrong conclusion. If we see and feel our inability to confront and overcome our sin, then we naturally conclude that to gain victory over sin we must have more power. We say, "Lord, if only I were stronger, I could control my outbursts of temper." We say to God saying, "God, I need something from you so **I** can do this or that," and so we plead with the Lord to strengthen us so **we** can exercise more self-control.

But this is absolutely wrong; that is not Christianity. God's way of delivering you from sin is not by making you stronger, but by making you weaker. God sets you free from the power of sin, not by strengthening you but by making you so weak that you must let His strength reign.

This is the way of God. We have so twisted Christianity that we've made it just like the paganism of this world. There are people today pursuing their idols and false gods based on the premise that they will be able to appease their god, their deity, which they serve and trust in. "**I** will appease Him," "**I** will offer sacrifices," "**I** will give my life to do this or that all in service to God." That is the idea that we have brought to Christianity, making us no different than the pagan bowing before an idol.

My friend, I cannot do the will of God. I confess as your shepherd I cannot do the will of God in my own life much less in the life of this church. I'm not sufficient; I'm not capable. Christianity is the life of God infused in you and me. I'm crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live but Christ lives in and through me. I know you know that but I suggest that you really don't know it. If you did, Christ would be living His life through you.

Jesus is waiting. What is He waiting for? He's waiting for you to acknowledge your weakness. Quit seeking strength. Quit trying to be strong for God. Quit trying to be spiritual. Embrace your weakness today. That's the key.

Listen to the Apostle Paul. What a remarkable man he was. To have the resurrected Jesus appear to you and be saved dramatically, and then to have the Lord use you in extraordinary ways. This man was gifted and talented. His abilities were incredible. Intellectually and spiritually he was a giant among his own peers. And to top it all off, he says that God allowed him into heaven and he saw things unlawful for him to repeat. I'm sure every young preacher would like that on their resume. But Paul was actually there and for that reason God knew Paul would not be able to contain his own pride and so it was given to him a thorn in the flesh, a messenger from Satan.

If God knew that vision of heaven would not ruin the Apostle Paul would He have given him a thorn in the flesh? No, there wouldn't have been any need for it.

As remarkable as this man was, even the blessing of God would have destroyed him, therefore God gave him a thorn in the flesh. We don't know what the thorn was, but it must have been terribly agonizing because he prayed three times for its removal. Finally, God answered.

2 Corinthians 12:9 —“And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for **My strength is made perfect in weakness.**” **Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.**”

My strength is made perfect in weakness. Think of this. How strong is God? Words fail to say because His power is infinite. Christ is saying to the Apostle Paul that God's strength is completed, perfected, in your puny weakness. “Paul, this is for your good. This is going to advance My kingdom all the more. I love you therefore I am keeping you humble to keep you dependent on Me because My strength is perfected—the complete power of God is resident, revealed—in your weakness.” It's always been this way. Power is not in our strength but in our weakness.

Look at Jacob. Rightly was he named. The name Jacob means *supplanter, deceiver, finagler*. He would cheat you and not bat an eye doing it. He would have made a great used car salesman or an infomercial spokesman. He was believable, you thought you could trust him, but he would swindle you and the next thing you know he's running to the next place. He was always running away from his problems. Now he has a problem that he cannot run from. There is no escape.

He's there at the river Jabbok and he begins to call out to God, “God, I'm in trouble. Help me. Help me. Help me.” All of a sudden God shows up and wrestles with this puny man. This is a most astonishing event. It's strange to think about—God wrestling with a man. Jacob latches on. His grip is firm and he says, “God, I will not turn You loose until you bless me!”

What did God do? He blessed him. How did He do it, by making him strong? By giving him victory over his brother? By making his sword stronger than Esau's? Absolutely not. He took His hand, touched his hip and crippled the man so that for the rest of his life he walked with a limp. But in that touch he was never again the same. Never again did he run from his problems, instead he stood and trusted God. Oh, faithful are the wounds of a friend!

What can I say about Moses? He was reared in the royal courts of Pharaoh and trained in the academics of the greatest civilization of its time, the mathematics and sciences of Egypt and he mastered them. He was a leader among leaders. He was next to the throne, ready to become the next Pharaoh, when he realized he wasn't the same. There was a call of God on his life and he knew it. He had heard the stories from his own mother how God had miraculously saved him from Pharaoh's sword and judgment in his earlier years. He knew the hand of God and Providence was in his life so at the age of 40 he decided he would deliver the people of Israel for God.

God had to send him to the backside of the desert for 40 years to wound him and strike him and humble him until Moses was absolutely nothing. God did such a marvelous job that when He finally appeared to him on Mount Sinai, Moses says "God, I can't do this. I'm not skilled, I'm not eloquent, I'm not capable." God did such a wonderful job of humbling Moses—He finally got Moses to believe what he couldn't do, but not He had to spend the next forty years teaching him what He could do through him.

But, as always, God first had to break Moses. And God, no respecter of persons, is doing the same for us. Thank God He loves us enough to bring the wound to teach us that spiritual strength is not resident within us, it's in our weakness.

This is what the Apostle Paul learned so he could say, "***most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.***"

Oak Grove, this is the answer. We've been groping around for years looking for the answer and this is it. We are to embrace our inabilities. We are to lay claim to our insufficiency, own our weakness and poverty, and not just own it, but boast in it. Paul said this was his confidence—that he had no confidence in himself! Do you see the principle? God's power gravitates to weakness like metal to a magnet. It gravitates to inability, to a person who says, "Lord God, I'm nothing without you." I know there isn't a Christian that doesn't know what I'm saying is true, but when God reveals it to your heart it becomes a way of life. That's why I say all these attempts to stir up revival are foolishness and a complete waste of time.

These people who claim if you just follow their method you could experience the power of God in your life, run away from them. They're charlatans; spiritual quacks. In fact, maybe I shouldn't

even give them the title 'spiritual.' It's a false spirituality. God and God alone redeems and God alone revives. Whom will He revive? Those who are broken and acknowledge that brokenness. Those who finally learn desperate dependency.

I have told as way of illustration that when a lamb does nothing but wander astray the shepherd must break the leg of a roaming lamb. But I've discovered that is a myth and not a true story. I've done all the research I could possibly do and there is no historical evidence or record of ever a shepherd breaking a sheep's leg. A break like that would most likely permanently cripple the sheep and make him therefore more subject to a predator because he couldn't keep up with the flock. Breaking the leg of lamb would most likely kill the animal because infection could set in. But there is a greater reason why I don't believe the story anymore.

As I thought about the parable in Luke 15 of the Good Shepherd going after the lost sheep, I remember the story says nothing about Him breaking the lost sheep's leg. The Bible does not say the Good Shepherd will break the leg of the lost sheep; the Good Shepherd risks His life to search for the lost sheep "and when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing." When home He hosts a celebration inviting friends and neighbors saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost."

There's no suggestion that he broke the leg of the sheep. But there is something that a shepherd will do that seems cruel and this comes to me by a true shepherd.

For those of us who know nothing about the care of sheep, it would be good for you to know that if a sheep has wandered away from the flock, especially upon the mountain side, and sees a green sprig of grass on a rocky ledge it seems it will ignore all the other grass on the mountain side in order to get that one sprig. Down the mountainside it carefully maneuvers and with a push and a jump it lands upon the rocky ledge that offers the small morsel. But going down was easy compared to going up and it cannot go down for it would fall to its death. It is trapped. It could be days before the shepherd finds it. It is all alone and with no place to go.

But at last the shepherd finds his erring lamb but does what we would think at first as very cruel—he will do absolutely nothing. He will leave the sheep there and come back tomorrow. He will do this for several days, but he refuses to rescue it. And as a result the sheep is left there to starve.

A few days later the shepherd will return and he will find his lost lamb weakened by the several days of no eating. The lamb is so desperate that now it cries, it bleats with such a mournful desperation that it sounds if the lamb heart is about to burst. Ah, this is what the shepherd has been waiting for; the cry of desperation; the cry that the lamb has given up on its own ability to save itself. He now knows that the lamb can be rescued. Had he tried earlier to rescue it before this bleating, this cry, it was still strong and would have panicked at his descent and perhaps leapt off the rocky ledge to its death below. But now it is weakened and the shepherd knows it's safe to approach. So he climbs down the side of the mountain, secures the lamb and hoists him and the lamb to safety.

Why are some of you still yet lost? I tell you it is because you are still strong in your pride and are still convinced that you are not in so much danger that you cannot get yourself out. You are not broken. You will not cry out to God realizing your hopelessness. You will not acknowledge your inability to save yourself, so therefore attempt after attempt is made to turn another leaf, to change, to try to do better. But you must be humbled even further, and so the Lord lets sin break your heart. That's what He's waiting for. I know it sounds cruel, but it's for your good. You will never look to the Lord until you come to the point where sin has broken your own heart and ruined you. I can think of no greater pain sin brings to your life as when you see the pain you're causing to those who love you the most. They're like a mirror. You look into their eyes and you see the sin hurting them and you see it, you see the mess you've made and you see the fact you need a Savior. You're not sufficient to save yourself. Cry out to Him. That's what He's waiting for. Oh, my foolish friend, hear the word of the Lord,

The LORD [is] nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit (Psalms 34:18).

The Good Shepherd does not require you to do anything but humble yourself. These are the sacrifices of God.

The sacrifices of God [are] a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise (Psalms 51:17).

The Shepherd of Heaven knows where you are but He waits for you to look to Him. The Scripture commands,

Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near (Isaiah 55:6).

The Bible gives you this promise,

And ye shall seek me, and find [me], when ye shall search for me with all your heart (Jeremiah 29:13).

Call upon Him this morning. Let Him hear the bleating cry of your desperation. God, I'm too weak. My sins are too many. You suppose that's your problem, but is it not possible that God has allowed you this much rope to bring you to that realization? Do you not see the hand of God? Perhaps fifteen years ago you would not have said your sins were so many, but now in fifteen years later you've added more and more sin. Can you not see that you cannot eliminate the penalty of those sins? The judgment is far too great, the burden far too heavy, turn it over to stronger hands and let Him bear you up on His shoulders. He will.

Let others boast how strong they be,
Nor death nor danger fear;
But we'll confess, O Lord, to thee,
What feeble things we are.

Is it not true that we've boasted in ourselves? We've boasted that God has to use us because we know the Bible. God says, "Okay, here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to make you a laughing stock. I'm going to make men despise you. I'm going to make men make fun of you until you have no pride and nothing to boast in except your Savior." It is then He will use us. What have we to boast in today? What do I have to brag about? Hasn't everything given to me been given by the grace of God?

What will I hold before the Lord on judgment day and say, "Look what I did for You, here are my tokens of appreciation"? The only thing I can boast in that day is the blood of the Lamb that was slain for me. Why was He sacrificed? Because all my sacrifices were not enough.

Friend, quit trying. Spiritual vitality doesn't come from strength, it comes from weakness. Admit your weakness. Embrace it, confess it and see how the power of God will come in to your life. That is the same truth for you, Christian; we need to embrace our weakness. We need to confess

and agree that in ourselves we can do nothing, but then the power of God will invade that vacuum of our poverty, infuse our weakness and not our strength but His will be revealed. Stand strong in the Lord and the power of His might.

Did we not sing it earlier?

Not what my hands have done can save my guilty soul;
Not what my toiling flesh has borne can make my spirit whole.

Not what I feel or do can give me peace with God;
Not all my prayers and sighs and tears can bear my awful load.

Your voice alone, O Lord, can speak to me of grace;
Your power alone, O Son of God, can all my sin erase.

No other work but Yours, no other blood will do;
No strength but that which is divine can bear me safely through.

That's for the Christian, not just the new convert. I pray you live in weakness, trusting in the Lord.

I have delivered these messages to you because I believe God wanted me to. I've shared with you that I believe He gave me a promise 20 years ago, reconfirmed it nearly two years ago and I guess in the end it doesn't matter whether you believe it's true or not. It's between me and the Lord. But I believe many of you have come to embrace it because God has made it real to you, but I want to warn us.

All temptation is primarily to look within, to take our eyes off the Lord and to base truth upon what you can see and hear. Faith always meets a wall of evidence that seems to contradict God's Word. The first contradiction doesn't come from Satan it comes from you. That temptation is to say, "Okay, I can do this. God can use me. God will use me because He's given me talents and abilities. That's a sure sign that God will use me."

The first temptation to deny what God has promised is to believe and trust in yourself. You will effectively stop the hand of God from working because His strength is only made perfect in weakness. When you come to a place where you become elevated, God will do what He promised.

The Christian life begins in weakness but something happens and we begin to become proud. I don't know how and it doesn't even matter how, it just happens. We begin to be arrogant and take our relationship with Christ as somehow making us special and better than somebody else.

Therefore, God has to bring the rod. He brings the blows until He humbles you. And here's the second temptation—self-pity. You know what self will say now? “God can't use me. I'm too weak. I'm no good. I don't have enough talents or abilities, I don't have enough intellect or eloquence.” Listen closely, it's one thing to say and believe you're incapable, it's another thing to believe that God in spite of your inabilities can use you. Your flesh will only believe what it can see and hear. God will have done such a wonderful job in humbling you that you can't even believe Jehovah can use you.

You'll think you are so spiritual in your humility. You'll go around and tell your friends, “I'm so weak. I'm so small. I'm just insignificant me.” And, sadly, you'll think that is humility. Not at all; it is not humility. True enough, God wants you to not trust in yourself; but at the same time He demands that your insufficiencies drive you to trust in Him.

Lastly, the temptation will then come from Satan. This is the progression of temptation: the last temptation, the only temptation outside of yourself and it comes from Satan himself. He will build a mountain of evidence through circumstances to not believe the promise of God to revive you and use you. Those circumstances will tell your eyes and ears that God will not do what He would say do. Here's the choice for you and me: either you believe the evidence of circumstances or you believe God.

That is the basis of every temptation.

I'm telling you that God can use you and this church. Not because we're special or talented or have resources. Look at us—we don't have resources. Our building and property is not the most attractive. We have very little as far as this world's wealth. We're a small crew at that. What do we have?

Satan will use what you see and hear and will convince you that God would never do something grand with us. He might do something like that with the church across the way but He won't do it with us. Do not believe what you see or hear.

What did Moses have in his hand? A rod. A stick. Tell me the wealth of that one stick. Tell me how valuable and worthy it was on the market. It wouldn't bring two pennies. He probably made and carved it himself. Yet God takes a rod in the hand of a man who didn't believe God could use him and He changes the world.

I believe the promise. I refuse to believe what I see. I refuse the testimony of these ears. I only believe what God says and oh, Lord, help me to only believe You at all times, no matter what I see. Amen.