

Psalms 119:25-32

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Date: 03 November 2020

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[0:00] So, I wills, the resolutions of the Psalms, that's what we're looking at. And our resolution today is not verse 27, it is verse 32.

! It's I will run. I will run. And it's not called physical health, I'm not asking you all to go and download Strava. To Paul and to Timothy says, it's a bodily exercise, it profits a little.

But godliness is profitable for all things. But the verb there, in Psalm 119 verse 32, this resolution, that the Psalmist says, I will run, is a picture of obedience.

And so, this lunchtime, the Christian has a determination that he will obey, she will obey. Everyone, everyone obeys, even the most independent and rebellious person obeys someone or something. Even if it's just his or her rationale or feelings, we all obey something. But in verse 32, it really is, I think, a summary of the Christian life. It's a verse full of instruction and obedience for the child of God.

[1:11] And it answers, actually, some really pertinent questions on the place of obedience in the Christian life. The basics of how we obey and where we obey and why we obey.

How are we to obey? Are we to run? It speaks of the place of obedience. The verb is speaking about the intensity of it. Where are we to run?

Well, we're given the direction and the boundaries and the limits and the duties. And the authority under which we are to run. We're to run in the way of God's commandments. So, the verse tells us the how and the where and the why.

And I want us to see that. I want us to see where he runs, first of all. Now, before the psalmist acts, God must act.

That's biblical ethics. That's biblical obedience. Before I will, God must will. And we must think of obedience in the light of biblical truth. We must, in the light of obedience, think of Jesus Christ.

[2:14] Because Jesus Christ provided a perfect obedience. He covers both our great and our desperate needs. His obedience was, theologians call, an active and a passive obedience.

In other words, the Lord Jesus, he perfectly obeyed all the demands of the law. He kept every single one of God's law that was applicable to him. And he kept them perfectly.

But he also obeyed by suffering the penalty of the law that you and I had broken. So, in both ways, his obedience was perfect.

It is both active and it is passive in what he suffers. And so, because of Christ's obedience, on the basis of what Christ has done, God, graciously and sovereignly, gives to his people new hearts.

Our old hearts were dead in sin. You cannot run, can you, with a non-beating heart. You need new life. You need a new heart.

[3:18] And without Christ, who gives that new heart, our own good works count for nothing. And so, first of all, a new heart, as it speaks at the end of verse 32, a new heart shows itself by faith in Christ.

Shows itself by trusting his obedience as the basis of our salvation. And our obedience is the fruit, it is the outworking of a new heart.

The evidence of the new birth. So, when we come to that, Psalm 119, verse 32, we've got to understand he is speaking as a believer. As a Christian.

The good works and the obedience that he's contemplating must be seen in the context of faith in Christ. But even then, even with a new heart, the psalmist recognizes, doesn't he, that he needs God to work in his own heart.

The great physician is always doing heart surgery on us. First of all, the great physician gives a spiritual transplant. And so, when you trust in the Lord Jesus, he takes your heart of stone, and he gives you a living spiritual heart.

[4:33] But then God continues to work in his children, doing whatever else is needed and necessary to bring that heart to peak performance.

So, Paul says in Philippians 2, doesn't he, work out your own salvation in fear and in trembling. You work it out in fear and in trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do.

So, we see here the psalmist speaking of the desire and the fact and the reality that God needed to change his heart. And that is the underlying principle.

That is the energy and dynamic. He's saying, isn't he, how can I obey, Lord, enlarge my heart? It's both a declaration of what God does in his people, and it's also a prayer, that what he wants God to do.

That he might grow in obedience, and his obedience will grow as God enlarges his heart. That should be our prayer. So, the word enlarge, speaks of breadth, doesn't it?

[5:39] It speaks of a capacity, a capacity to do whatever needs to be done. Lord, enlarge my heart. And so, as we think of obedience, we need to have our hearts enlarged.

It says later in the psalm, Psalm 119 and verse 96, that your commandments, O Lord, are broad, exceedingly broad. So, the obedience needed is broad, and for that obedience, we need a broad and enlarged heart.

Augustine, the early church father, he got it. He prayed this, command what you will. That's a wide prayer, isn't it?

God, command whatever you want, command whatever you will, but grant whatever you command. That Augustine looks to God in every aspect of obedience.

And so, the prayer here is, give my heart a greater capacity, God. Give my heart a greater strength, a greater endurance. Enlarge my understanding, my wisdom, my courage, my delight, my affections.

[6:47] All these things are included in the word heart. Enlarge my heart. I'm not a doctor, which might surprise you, but a large heart physically is potentially dangerous, isn't it?

Isn't that right? If you go to a hospital, they say your heart is enlarged, that's not a good thing. But spiritually, to have a large heart, that is a blessed condition. To be a big-hearted man or woman is godly.

And we need to be praying that God would give us big hearts. It's what we need most of all. Isn't it? A heart that is filled with grace and mercy of God in Christ Jesus. That's filled with love, love for God, for giving us life and a new heart and love to our neighbor.

Charles Bridges said on this verse, he said, it's not so much about largeness of gifts. That's often what we look for, isn't it? That's often what we pray for.

But it's not so much about largeness of gifts, but enlargement of heart. Give me a big heart. 1 John 5, verse 3 says, this is the love of God, that we keep his commands.

[8:00] An enlarged heart will speak of increased love. Jesus says, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. And so do you see this pattern that goes right the way through Scripture that is encapsulated in this verse?

An enlarged heart means greater love for God and our neighbor and keeping the commandments. The prayer for an enlarged heart leads us right to the law of God.

So that establishes the connection. Where do we run? How do we run? Well, God enlarges our hearts. Secondly, where do we run? Can you see that in the verse? I will run in the way of your commandments.

I will run in the way of your commandments. People are running madly in all directions and zeal without knowledge is fanatical inside and outside of the church. But the psalmist is envisioning here, isn't he?

A course. There is a race to be run. No one does cross country and you go to these races and there's these tracts marked out on these fields.

[9:02] And they have to run. And I can never work out where they go but they have to run in a certain way and occasionally somebody gets disqualified because they cut off a corner and save themselves 50 meters or something.

But there is a course to be run. And so in the Christian life there is a course to be run and it is the way of your commandments. And Jesus again, isn't it? He is the great example when he prayed in obedience, not my will but yours be done.

Our hearts must be wide but the way is narrow. The way is narrow that leads to life.

It's the way of the biblical law. And I think as we think of obedience it's helpful to be reminded of the context that this isn't just fair weather obedience.

Just look with me at where the psalmist is in verse 25. It's really evocative language, isn't it? My soul clings to the dust. And so here is a man whose soul is in the dirt.

[10:06] He is downcast. And he seems to be stuck there. He is clinging to the dust. And dust is clinging to him. But do you notice the echo in verse 28? Can you see it?

My soul melts away for sorrow. Strengthen me according to your word. He's poured out with sorrow, poured out with heaviness.

He feels such a weight. And so here's the last person you would expect to be running. He's weary. That's what the word poured out is. It's a picture of leaking and dripping out or melting away.

It's the tears of a heavy heart. They're melting away his very soul. But look what he does in verse 31. There's the echo. So verse 25, my soul clings to the dust.

Verse 31, I cling to your testimonies, O Lord. It's the same word. And so when my soul clings to the dust, when I feel lower than low, what am I to do?

[11:06] I'm to cling to your testimonies. The more my soul clings to the dust, the more I'm to cling to the word. Some of you have done that, hasn't it?

I've seen that in your lives. It's been a huge encouragement to us that when you are at your lowest, you cling to the word of God. You come to hear the word preached. And the more your soul is clinging to the dust, the more you must, by God's grace, cling to his word, to his promises and to his laws in Christ.

And so you see, with that source of obedience, Lord, enlarge my heart. And with that course laid out before him, the law of the commandments, he says, I will run. And so why does he use the word run?

Why does he use the word run? It's a picture of obedience, isn't it? And I think there are several reasons. I think he wants to run because he can run.

He wants to run because he can run. My dad is 85 and he would often have played sports with us and we would have played football and I see him now, I don't see him very much, I haven't seen him since March, well, for a while, in August.

[12:23] But when he plays, he can no longer run. You see him as Noah dribbles the ballpark. He'd love to run, but he can't. I think of Phoebe's little friend in her little group in school, Marwa.

And Marwa, I don't know what happened to her, but she walks with a frame. In fact, she doesn't walk, she wobbles with a frame. And you see her in the playground and they're running around, but she is there with her walking frame.

And Marwa would love to run, but she can't run. But in Christ, we have been given spiritual legs and hearts. And sometimes, we should want to run just because we can.

And we should want to run in the way of God's commandments because we can in Christ. You know in films, you know the scene, don't you, two people get off a steam train, or one is waiting for their lover, and the person gets off the steam train and the steam is blowing and they're at the end of the platform and they catch sight of one another, the lovers that have been separated.

And how does the man and the woman walk towards each other? Does he rub his finger on his leg and dawdle? Doesn't he? What do they do? You know the picture.

[13:37] They run towards each other and they embrace. They don't sort it. They don't dilly-dally aimlessly. And so they run without delay.

Here's the picture. And so our obedience is to Christ. It is for Christ. It is towards Christ. And he says, run in the way of my commandments. He's confident to run. You wouldn't run through a forest at night. You wouldn't do it. You don't know where you're going. The Bible says, doesn't it, it is a light to our path and a lamp to our feet. And so God's commandments are safe. There's no holes to twist your ankle. There's no question over whether when you go God's way that is the right direction to go. A clear command in the Bible is always safe.

And so you and I as people who are in Christ we can commit ourselves to running Christ's way. It's safe to run Christ's way. Jesus will never lead you astray. His commands are sure they are certain and you and I can run with full and complete confidence in the obedience of His commands.

[14:51] And so your feelings they may tell you something very different mightn't they? Your feelings may tell you no, if you go the way of God you will miss out. If you go in the direction of the law of God your life will be dull.

And all sorts of things come into your mind. But for those of us who are in Christ what we see here in Scripture is that the way of God's commands are safe and right and blessed.

And you can run in them in full confidence. And I think the psalmist here also wants to run because he knows the more he runs the more he'll be able to run. You know couch to 5k isn't it? You start off you can hardly do any running. And gradually day by day you build up to the end of the month and you can run a 5k can't you? And you find that you can run longer and longer. How do you become a good runner? You run. You run through the pain. You don't stop when there's discomfort. And as Christian in our Christian obedience we can often be slowed down by comfort or pain or ridicule.

[16:00] And the more we bail out and the more we stop in our obedience the less endurance we have. And so we are not able to run as we should. And so it's a determination isn't it?

To run in God's commandments with the assurance that as you do that as you set your face towards obedience what will God do? He will enlarge your heart. Obedience in the Bible is sometimes talked about as walking in the ways of the Lord.

And that is the picture of a kind of habit regularly day by day godly obedience. But you see here in verse 32 the picture is of running it's of zeal and it's of intensity.

It's cheerful ready zealous observance of God's commands. We run because God has given us a heart to do it. And if you've ever run at all you'll know that as you run you're helped by someone else running with you.

And so as believers shall we run together? Shall we commit to running together encouraging one another helping cheering each other on supporting one another as we run in the way of God's commands?

[17:18] The truth is of course everybody's running. You're running towards eternity and the issue is which road are you running on?

Matthew chapter 7 tells us there's a really easy road and there's a wide road and there's lots of people on it but the end of that road leads to destruction. There's also a narrow road and a narrow gate and few there are that find it but it leads to life abundant.

Life eternal and so are you running on the right road? And if you are running on the right road are you running as you should be all out? What's the pace of your obedience?

Is your desire to be a runner in the Christian life or are you content to be a jogger? A stroller? Even a spectator? It'll look differently won't it?

It'll look differently for you than it will for me. It'll look differently for the Apostle Paul in him running his race in his apostolic ministry than it did for the woman in the temple getting that coin out of her pocket and putting it in and to others it looked like nothing but Jesus says she's given more than all of you and it will look differently.

[18:35] There will be different callings and different gifts and yet all of us are called to run and we run the race looking only unto Jesus. You know when your children are in a race or when they were in a race and they ran past the crowd of parents who did they look for?

They looked for mum or dad and that's what they were interested in. And so as we run the Christian life we run it not looking really at others not looking for applause but we run it looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of faith.

It's a wonderful verse isn't it? I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart. Thank you.