Vanity Fair

When Christian and Faithful came out of the wilderness, they immediately saw a town in front of them. The name of the town is Vanity. This town has a Fair called Vanity Fair, which is held all year long. It bears the name Vanity Fair because the town where it is held is less than vanity.
The Meaning of Vanity

• The OED defines vanity as “that which is vain, futile, or worthless; that which is of no value or profit.”

• “To say ‘all is vanity’ is to say that nothing has meaning or significance ultimately. Nihilism means literally ‘nothing-ism’” (R.C. Sproul).
The Origin of Vanity Fair

• Almost 5,000 years ago, pilgrims such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, and Daniel were walking on a path to the Celestial City that went right through the town of Vanity.

• Beelzebub, Apollyon, and Legion decided to set up a Fair “where all sorts of vanity could be sold all year long.”
Historical Background

- John Bunyan would have been familiar with the many fairs held in his day.
- The Elstow Fair had been a great institution since Henry II (1133-1189) granted a charter to the nuns of the Abbey there.

Elstow Abbey
The one fair, however, which was probably the historical foundation for Vanity Fair was the one held for centuries near Cambridge: **Stourbridge Fair**.

- It was announced by the Vice-Chancellor of the University and opened by state officials, including the Mayor and other members of the Corporation of Cambridge, and lasted for weeks.
Historical Background

- Medieval Cambridge was a thriving market town and inland port with a castle.
- In the early 13th century, King John gave the city a charter and the right to hold Stourbridge Fair.
- It lasted for over 700 years, starting after harvest on September 16 and lasting the whole month.
- It was one of the greatest trade fairs in Europe and was made possible because of the river system.
Historical Background

• The Sturbridge Fair was extremely large, covering an area of half a square mile.
• There was a long line of booths set up in rows, which were named for the type of merchandise sold there.
• It had its Great One of the fair, which was its Court of Justice presided over by the Mayor or his deputy.
Historical Background

• “It was a vast emporium of commerce” (John Brown).

• Merchandise came from France, Scotland, London, and from the voyages of Drake, Cavendish, and Raleigh. Products came from the east and west of the Atlantic.

• In the center of the “green”, there was a maypole topped with a vane.
Seen at Sturbridge Fair

“Coffee houses, taverns, music-halls, buildings for the exhibition of drolls (buffoon, jester, humorist), legerdemain (sleight of hand), mountebanks (itinerant charlatans who sold supposed medicines and remedies), wild beasts, monsters, dwarfs, giants, rope-dancers, and the like.”

- John Brown, John Bunyan: His Life, Times, and Work
Cambridge: The Leper Chapel of St. Mary Magdalene
Stourbridge Common

THE LEPER CHAPEL
OF
ST. MARY MAGDALENE
IN THE PARISH OF HOLY CROSS

This chapel was built in the early 12th century as part of the nearby Leper Hospital.

In 1211 King John granted a fair, to be held on the feast of Holy Cross, on Stourbridge Common, to support the work of the hospital. It became the largest medieval fair in Europe and some of the streets near here still bear their original names.

The Chapel gradually fell into disrepair but was restored in the mid 19th Century. It is now owned by the Cambridge Preservation Society. Tel 243830

Regular worship is still conducted at the Chapel and it is also used as a place of prayer and retreat. Details from the Vicar of Holy Cross, tel 413343

Visitors may obtain keys from the Station House, Barnwell Junction, behind this Chapel.
“This chapel was built in the early 12\textsuperscript{th} century as part of the nearby Leper Hospital. \textbf{In 1211} King John granted a fair, to be held on the feast of Holy Cross, on Stourbridge Common, to support the work of the hospital. It became the largest medieval fair in Europe and some of the streets near here still bear their original names.”
# Vanity Fair’s Merchandise

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“There is hardly any end to the list.”

William Hendriksen
“As the manager of the Performance sits before the curtain on the boards and looks into the Fair, a feeling of profound melancholy comes over him in his survey of the bustling place. There is a great quantity of eating and drinking, making love and jilting, laughing and the contrary, smoking, cheating, fighting, dancing and fiddling; there are bullies pushing about, bucks ogling the women, knaves picking pockets,
policemen on the look-out, quacks bawling in front of their booths, and yokels looking up at the tinselled dancers and poor old rouged tumblers, while the light-fingered folk are operating upon their pockets behind. Yes, this is VANITY FAIR; not a moral place certainly; nor a merry one, though very noisy.”
Vanity Fair is the City of Destruction in its gala dress, in its most seductive sensual allurements.

- G.B. Cheever
The People of Vanity Fair

- They have never set one foot out of the fair; they live in it all year round.
- They walk according to the course of this world (Eph. 2:2).
- The god of this world has blinded their minds (II Cor. 4:4).
- They love the world and its many vanities.
- They reject true religion, i.e., Christianity.
The People of Vanity Fair

• They are drawn into the Fair with devastating consequences: compromised principles, morals, health, damaged self-respect and relationships, etc.

• The carnal mind craves one worldly trifle after another.

• As idolaters, they seek happiness from the creature instead of the Creator.
“No crime has ever been committed on earth, or conceived in the heart of man, which did not arise from this universal apostasy and idolatry.”

- Mason
An Important Shift in Bunyan

• **Internal Journey:** Until now, John Bunyan has been writing his allegory about the soul facing a multitude of enemies as it makes its journey toward the Celestial City.

• **External Journey:** Now Bunyan turns our attention to the allurements of the world and shows how a true follower of Christ should live in this world.
“Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If any one loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world” (I John 2:15-16).
“This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (James 1:27).
“You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (James 4:4).
“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2).
The Prince of princes went through Vanity Fair to his own country. Beelzebub invited him to buy his vanities. “But he had no desire for the merchandise and left the town without spending even a penny on these vanities.”
Moving Through Vanity Fair

• The basis of our sanctification is our union with Christ.

• Present your bodies a living sacrifice. This is a permanent offering and entails a constant dedication.

• It is the mercy of God that melts our hearts.

• All of our calculations, plans, and ambitions must not be determined by this evil age.
Moving Through Vanity Fair

• We must establish patterns and habits that are in line with the world to come.
• We must constantly be in the process of being metamorphosed by renewing our minds.
• We must, by the grace of God, switch our allegiance from the world to Christ.
• Recognize that the three vices mentioned by John are cravings, lust, and boasting.
• Let the kingdom always be before you.
• Believe with all your heart in the things that are invisible.
• Let nothing that is on this side of the heavenly world get within you.
• Guard your heart (Prov. 4:23) and beware of the lusts that lie within you, for they are deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9).
“We Christians are to live on a different plane. We are to live *coram Deo*, before the face of God. This is life not under but beyond the sun. There we find not nothing but the One Thing, the Somethingest Thing that could ever be, God himself. Living *coram Deo* means understanding that vanity is vain, futility futile, and chasing wind only so much chasing wind.
“With our hearts abiding beyond the sun, we care about those playing in the barren sands, those sinking into an eternal grave at Vanity Fair. Living *coram Deo* means sharing the warning of the Teacher that beneath the sun is only folly and beyond it only wisdom. It means drinking deep from the life-giving water of him who alone can satisfy our thirst.”
Facing Vanity Fair

Which booth in Vanity Fair has the strongest pull on your life?