*Job 29:1-8, 14-16, 19*

***Don’t Get Stuck in the Glory Days*** *(Job Series Pt. 4)*

 Today we’re continuing to look at the life of Job. We’ve discussed toxic people by looking at Job’s friends, we’ve considered how to come before God in our anger, and today we’re going to confront another common temptation when going through tough times in our life. On first reading, chapter 29 may not seem that bad … it’s just Job reminiscing about old times … a lot of us do that … but wait, there is a very strong caution God is giving us between the lines of his words.

Let me start off with a little ditty from Bruce Springsteen ...

I had a friend, was a big baseball player back in high school
He could throw that speedball by you, make you look like a fool boy
Saw him the other night at this roadside bar,
I was walking in, he was walking out.
We went back inside, sat down had a few drinks
But all he kept talking about was
Glory days, well they’ll pass you by
Glory days in the wink of a young girl’s eye
Glory days, Glory days.

Here’s the start of another song - see if you can tell which one:
"Hey, everybody’s talkin’ about the good old days, right
Everybody, the good old days, well, let’s talk about the good old days
Come to think of it as, as bad as we think they are
*these* will become the good old days for our children, hmm
Oh, why does it seem the past is always better
We look back and think
The winters were warmer; the grass was greener
The skies were bluer; and smiles were bright."

 The faithful of God are no different. We think about the *Glory Days*, the *Good Ole Days*. We long for a simpler time, a happier time. A time when our faith was strong and we rejoiced in our salvation. It seemed like a family reunion every time we went to church. The pews were full … and it seemed the words the preacher spoke came directly from the mouth of God … But now, sadly, the luster has worn off. Our exuberant faith has been replaced by dull, disillusionment. The preacher’s words sound more like the teacher in a Charlie Brown cartoon (*waa waa waa waaa*) than the utterance of God. Oh, for a return to the Glory Days.
 Job had a little pity party about the glory days too – or not so little - it lasts an entire chapter. His first words are sentiments I’ve heard dozens of times from the mouths of fellow Christians – “Oh how I long for the days gone by!” He talks about the times when God preserved him and his candle shone over Job’s head. Those were the days when Job had plenty and his children were all around him. He says, “the rock poured out rivers of oil” – a way of saying he found great prosperity in what seemed very little work. And then he finds an inflated view of himself too – “I was eyes to the blind, an feet to the lame … my roots spread out to the waters, with dew all night on my branches”
 How often do we miss the moments of the present dwelling on the memories of the past? Could it be that these are the glory days of our life and we’ll look back with regret that we missed them? Now, again, let’s have some compassion for Job – this is still a man beset with indescribable loss, grief, sickness, abandonment and discouragement. Hard to find anything to glory about there … The problem is that I hear this kind of reminiscing, this getting stuck in the so-called glory days, from all kinds of people, who if they could see their lives from a different perspective, are actually very blessed.

 On top of that, we have every modern convenience at our fingertips. We have surgeries that can give you perfect vision. We have doctors that specialize in every imaginable practice of medicine. We have computers that fit in the palm of our hand that allow us to look up virtually any piece of information we want or communicate with people on the other side of the world. With all these conveniences, can the 21st century believer expect to relish in a bed of roses without feeling a thorn or two? Of course not. Things go wrong. People get hurt. Sickness still comes. Hearts get broken. I realize there are many people out there for whom these kinds of answers don’t seem to come. Nevertheless, with all these modern surroundings we find that we really are no different than old Job.

 When we have to look back into the past to see marks of God’s favor, because we can find none in the present, this should be a warning sign – and I don’t mean a small little road sign kind of a thing, I mean something the size of one of those jumbo-trons you find in PNC park and Heinz field! … ***[Pause]***

 If we, then, are unable to change our circumstances, how can we be happy and blessed when chaos seems to reign all around us? Must we accept and succumb to the problems before us, or do we just try to pray them away? … No, I think it is our *attitude* that must come under subjection to the Holy Spirit if we are to realize the hand of blessing in the midst of the storm. Let’s take a gander at some wise words shared by the Apostle Paul to the church at Corinth *(2 Cor. 6:2-10, NIV selected verses):* “I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, *now* is the day of salvation … in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; ***having nothing, and yet possessing everything***.
 I tell you, as I read those words, it moved me in a mighty way – “having nothing, and yet … possessing everything.” How can I whine about events and situations in my life in light of the terrible events in Paul’s life, who after tremendous persecution considered himself rich beyond measure? Compare that to Job – I’m not criticizing Job, I would have been far worse in his place … I’m simply pointing out the *huge difference* having Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit makes for *us* now.
 Let me share a quote from Methodist pastor, Rev. Sam Peters, in his study on the life of Job: “When our family gets together we sit around and laugh at some of the bizarre childhood feats we went through. Now, the stress and busyness of everyday life seems to suck every drop of fun and happiness right out of our lives sometimes. Too many times … I catch myself looking back and, just like Job, wish for the old days when times were simpler and slower paced. But then again, as I think about it, in the middle of the most tumultuous times of my adult life, God has found a way to make himself *real* to me. And then I understand that I’m reliving *a blessed moment*. A special time that God met with me … *That* is a *true* “Glory Days” moment - a time I didn’t miss by bemoaning the situation … a time I can recall later as a time I grew stronger in faith and more in love with my Savior.”[[1]](#footnote-1) … So it all depends on *how we look at the past* … cause we’re going to do it, right?

 When we look back, do we focus on the *easy times* and long to *return* to that place, instead of facing the present … or do we also look at the *hard times* and see how God was working, giving us fresh strength to find the glory in *today*! ***[Pause]***

 In the book of Job, we see different kinds of old age … there’s the most literal kind – being advanced in years … there’s the kind of old age that shines with wisdom learned over time … but *here* we see a *less than luminous* kind – a psychological and spiritual old age, which sees nothing in the future and glories only in the past – it presents a sad picture indeed. When we are in a situation where the present and the future look dark and we take pride in the past and cannot give God the glory for the present (or the future), something is wrong.

 Jesus himself had to teach this lesson to the people of his day, not just the scribes and the Pharisees, but to many who glorified Israel’s past before the Roman occupation. The Apostle Paul, too, had an entirely different outlook on life. He says in Philippians 3:13 – “Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do; forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way.”

 What is “this way”? It’s not thinking with sullen longing for the past … it’s not getting stuck in a cage of romanticized memory … it’s living in ***hope*** … of what God is doing right NOW … Make no mistake, this was a huge part of why his life was marked with overflowing joy. Paul was even willing to forget the *victories* of the past, if they would slow him down in the present, if they would tempt him to think, “Well, I’ve done my part … that’s good enough.” He knew - and he calls us to know - that the matters of yesterday will not do for today. The bright candle of yesterday is but the burnt wick of today … *if* we don’t *keep* it lit by *active faith* in the present. We live in Christ today … who Hebrews says “is the same yesterday, today and forever” (13:8)… Jesus is not a Savior stuck in the historical accounts of the past … he’s not in the tomb … he’s not back in the first century … he’s here. He reigns in this moment. And so, when we speak of our faith, something is missing from our testimony if the story we share is only something from our past.

 I have a friend who challenges *every* Christian – when you share your testimony, your story of how God changed your life in Jesus – it’s not enough simply to talk about your conversion, the way you came to faith long ago … your ongoing testimony – like your faith – needs to be a living thing – intentionally looking for how God is working in your life right now, so you can incorporate that into your testimony – the story you share with the new people who come into your life. Think about it … people want to hear about a God who not only did mighty deeds long ago … but is doing great things today! In my grandmother’s book on Job, Theodore Epp affirms this as well when he writes, “Those who look back only to the moment of salvation for a testimony have missed out in what the Spirit of God has for them in the present.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

 Here’s the thing … *even if* all the glowing things Job said about himself were true – and to large extent they probably were - even if our recollection of what the past was like is *relatively* accurate – though it’s human nature to sugarcoat it – it doesn’t matter – it’s besides the point; because the gospel (in the OT *and* NT) calls us to live by faith in our *today!*

 One last illustration as I close. Some years ago, police in Philadelphia arrested a 40-year old man for stealing cement. The officers reported that Angelo Grisolia spent several hours loading over 6,000 pounds of cement into a borrowed truck. When he tried to drive the truck from the scene, it wouldn’t move, because it was stuck in the sand with the overload.[[3]](#footnote-3) How many Christians there are who have lost the blessing and joy in the Lord they once knew, simply because they have overloaded their lives with longing for the past, getting them stuck, like *cement in the sand* … instead of living in complete dependence on God in the present.

 Jesus is alive. Jesus is all-knowing, he is all-powerful, and is present everywhere, even right here in our midst. We have nothing to be afraid of and every reason to move forward as Christians and as a congregation as we boldly proclaim the resurrected and glorious Lord to a dying world. Why get stuck in the “Glory Days” of old … when our glory days are still here?!

Amen.

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1. Rev. Sam Peters, *Glory Days*, sermoncentral.com [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Theodore Epp, *Job: A Man Tried as Gold*, 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. J. Allen Blair, *Living Patiently*, 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)