



Job 29:1-17  
 Life Is Too Short To...  
 "Live In The Past"

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Life is short, isn't it? In the grand scheme of things, the years that we spend here on earth are pretty limited. And to make matters worse, the years seem to go by faster as we get older. There's actually a reason for that...but that's a rabbit hole we're not going down this morning. You can use some of your own precious time and look it up online later ☺. But life is just so short! Even if you live to 100...it's just a tick of the hands on the clock of history.

**So, what are we going to do, and how are we going to live, with the time we each get?** How are we going to use this one shot at life that God has given us? This is the question at the crux of our summer sermon series. And it's a deeply Biblical question, because God created us in his image and has given us this time. So, we start today with, "Life is too short...to live in the past." Watch this little video clip from the movie *Napoleon Dynamite* to help introduce this theme for today. It starts with a comment about throwing a "pigskin" a quarter mile. In case you're not familiar: a "pigskin" is a way of talking about a football. **(Video Clip here).**

Living in the past like that can be easy to do for some people. Now, I would also venture to say there's a good possibility that there are some people at Rose Hill today who do not live in the past. They don't try and re-live yesterday's glory days or get caught in trying to fix yesterday's mistakes. And if you'd like to meet those people just head on over to our children's classrooms...because kids live that way! The rest of us struggle with it to one degree or another. Let's look at this morning's passage to see about one guy who clung to the past, for at least a bit: **Job 29:1-17.**

In this morning's passage, we see how Job longed to return to the past. **His history is one which he would like to repeat.** Maybe you can identify with that. Job says in verse 2 of this morning's passage, "How I long for the months gone by..." Job longs to return to the way things were, because things were good! And in these first 6 verses he recounts God's blessings upon him. He knew God's presence was with him, when the light of the Lord shone

upon him and guided his way. He was young and in his prime, his children were with him, he had an abundance of everything he needed.

In verse 6, he reminisces about when his steps were washed with milk, and oil poured out from the rocks. In this poetic language, he recounts how some of the staples of the Israelite life were abundant for him. In our house, it would be akin to us thanking God for an abundance of Fillet Mignon, lobster, and caviar (just kidding). More like PB and J, mac and cheese, cheerios and milk, hot dogs and hamburgers; those are the things that our household seems to have an abundance of.

**In verses 7-10, Job recalls how he was the most respected elder in the city.** In that time, the city square was the place where people gathered to exchange goods, exchange ideas, and to fellowship with one another. It was also the place where the elders of the city gathered to make decisions and to settle disputes between people. And out of all of them, Job was the noblest, most respected one. The young men stepped back, the aged stood up, noble ones ended their conversations, even princes were hushed.

What people heard of him brought commendation; what people saw of him was approved. Why? Because as **verses 11-17 tell us, he was a godly man.** He aided the poor; he helped the orphan who had no one to help them; he reached out to the widow and his support caused her to sing for joy. He put on righteousness, and literally, it clothed him. He would wear special clothes – a special robe and turban – that would make him identifiable as one of the elders, and people knew that he was fair and just. He was the eyes for the blind, he was the feet for the lame, he was a father to the needy and championed the cause of the stranger. But Job did more than just aid those who were in need. He went a step further. As verse 17 says, he “broke the fangs of the unrighteous and made them drop their prey from their teeth.” Job sought to break the power of the oppressors. And because of all this, Job was highly respected. He was an honored man.

**But that was “yesterday.”** That was months ago. That was last year. Job now finds himself destitute, without his children, and he's surrounded by three so-called friends who keep giving him bad advice. They're not exactly

predecessors to Dr. Laura, Dr. Phil, and Ann Landers. They're more like the three stooges dispensing some combination of amateur theology, psychology, and counseling. Even his wife tells him near the beginning of the story to just “curse God and die” (Job 2:9). How sweet of her. I'm sure she meant it in a good way, though.

So, that's the context in which we find him speaking these words we read this morning, “How I long for the months gone by.” Now, it should be noted, that in all of the book of Job, this is the only chapter he spends reminiscing about the past.

He recalls the way things used to be, and while he desires to be in that place again, he knows he can't go back. He knows that life is too short to live in the past, even though for a moment he considers it. Any sense of a recovery of the past can only come from the future. And God holds the future in the palms of his hands. Job can't do it alone, and he can't force it to happen. The Bible says, **“As an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about” (James 5:10-11).** In the end, the patience and perseverance of Job resulted in God mercifully and graciously providing abundantly once again. In fact, we're told at the end of the book of Job that the latter part of Job's life was more blessed than the first. He gained back his animals to the point that his herds were twice the size that they used to be! God gave him children again, and he lived long enough to see his great-great-grandchildren.

The story of Job is a story of a successful man who knew his successes were not the fruits of his own genius, but the fruits of God's blessing. Job never loses sight of God's provision in the good times. Then he lost everything and suffered greatly, but in the end was vindicated by the Lord, returning to his once lofty status, and even beyond. And that return to glory is because of the Lord, for sure, but also because of Job. He remains faithful to God through it all; not that he was perfect at it...but that's where he lands. That the Lord will take care of him in the long run. And: **The problem with living in the**

**past is we doubt what God has done in the past, and it prevents us from trusting God in the present and for the future.**

When we constantly look to the past, wish for the past to have gone differently, or wondering “what if”: then we are doubting God for the past, and not trusting God in the present or for the future. We may not put it that way...we may not realize that’s what we’re doing. But in essence, we are. We might couch it in language of self-critique and self-questioning – what if “I” had done things differently...or critique of others – “what if he or she had done things differently” (Rico)...but even then, the unspoken question is directed at God. It’s questioning God’s work in your life – in the past, the present and the future. It undermines our trust. It undermines our confidence in God’s sovereignty. It doesn’t *actually* undermine his sovereignty...but it undermines our trust. It causes cracks in our relationship with God. Job trusted that God would get him through this.

Is that where you and I are...are we living in that kind of trust like Job? **Or are we trying to live in the past?** Like Rico in that movie clip, maybe there’s some glorious thing from the past that you’re trying to hold onto, or it’s trying to hold onto you, and it’s keeping you from trusting God now and for the future...from being who God is calling you to be. Trust God more.

Now, not everyone wishes to live in past glories. **There are also the times in our past that we wish we could forget, but we keep living under their control.** Don't we all have those! The mistakes we made, the hurts we caused, the drugs we took, the drinks we had, the websites we've visited, the tattoo we got, the emotions we've expressed inappropriately, the things that someone said to us or did to us or violated us in some way...Wow, the list goes on.

Life is *definitely* too short to live in those pasts...and yet so many people struggle to be set free from them. In Luke 4 we're told of Jesus standing up in the synagogue, and reading from Isaiah these words, “...**he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor**” (Luke 4:18-19). That’s part of the

passage that preceded what we looked at last week, actually. And then Luke records for us that Jesus sat down and said to the congregation, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” In other words: through Jesus Christ, you and I are free from our past sins, mistakes, regrets, and hurts. In the language of Independence Day: We can live independently and free from our past that seeks to hold us down and keep us from trusting God today.

Paul gives us perhaps the most memorable line about freedom from our past when he writes, **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).** Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, we are set free from our past. We just sang about how Jesus releases the captives, and that includes being held captive to our own past. Our past sins, our past regrets, the mistakes we've made, the people who have wronged us...all of it you and I are free from when we confess our sin and turn to Jesus' healing power. **You and I are free to live in Jesus Christ so that now we live by the will of God, rather than being controlled by something in our own history.**

I can't remember if I've shared this next story with you or not, so forgive me if I have. But when I was a freshman in High School, I took a class in Washington State History. And one of our assignments during the course of the semester was to give an oral report on some aspect of Washington State History. I was so scared to give that oral report, that from the moment I sat down at my school desk after it was done until this very moment standing before you, I don't know what I said. I got to the front of the class to give my report, and what came out of my mouth I have no idea.

My head was spinning, my heart was racing, my blood was pumping, I remember seeing colors and stars...Actually, that was kind of like the first time I met Gwen, too...it's a miracle I didn't pass out. I was terrified of public speaking. That was the old Brian. The new creation that God has brought forth out of that can stand here before you without the fear of public speaking and (you'll be glad to know) without fear of passing out. Sometimes when I sit down after a sermon, I still have no idea what I actually said...but I trust that the Lord speaks to each of us through these sermons.

The point is this: I am not controlled by that fear of speaking any more. The fact that I stand before you every Sunday morning is a testimony to the transformational power of Jesus Christ in my life. God had to transform me in order to use me the way that He wanted. God had a plan for me in my life, and in order for that plan to come to fruition, God had to do a little work on me. He had to free me from this fear, by putting me in places where I spoke to smaller groups – like ski school classes, working as waiter, teaching kids’ Sunday school classes, speaking to teenagers at youth group, and so forth. Through those opportunities God gave me, he helped me move away from my past and the fear of speaking in front of people to be where I am now.

Maybe you are like Job, or like Rico in that clip, and look back with fondness at a period of time in your life and wish you could live it over again believing that your present and your future might somehow be better than what they currently are. Or maybe there's something negative that happened in your past that still controls you today. In either case: **Trust that Jesus Christ has something better and more glorious in mind for you if you’d only let go of that past and move forward in faith.** Trust that “God’s got this.” I’ve been preaching that three-word sermon to myself – “God’s got this” – a lot this last few weeks as we prepare to go to one service and as the Hudsons move on. “God’s got this...God’s got this...God’s got this.”

Because, life is too short to live in the past; I want to trust God for today, tomorrow and eternity, rather than undermining that through the “What if” game. So, let Job and these other passages we’ve looked at today be our source of hope: By the grace of God you and I can move forward into a new and glorious future. Jesus Christ wants to make that happen. He wants us to rely so fully on him – individually, in our families, in our church, in our places of work and recreation – he wants us to trust him, to believe him so completely, that *nothing* from our past would control the future that's in His hands. Life is too short to live in the past. Instead, let’s live for Jesus and trust him more, each and every day. Let’s pray...Amen.