

Sunday April 3rd, 2022

Job 29:1-25
“The Good Old Days”

When Nostalgia Was a Disease by [Julie Beck](#). Atlantic Monthly AUGUST 14, 2013
Cures ranged from sending sufferers home to threatening them with pain and terror—but some treatments contained sound advice. People who like to bring up old Saturday morning cartoons at parties (you know who you are) should be grateful it's not a few hundred years ago. We'd have license to leech them, bully them, and maybe even bury them alive.

These were some of the treatments proposed for nostalgia during the 17th to 19th centuries, when it was considered a psychopathological disorder--rather than a blanket term for fondness for anything that existed more than thirty minutes ago. Swiss physician Johannes Hofer coined the term in his 1688 medical dissertation, from the Greek *nostos*, or homecoming, and *algos*, or pain. The disease was similar to paranoia, except the sufferer was manic with longing, not perceived persecution, and similar to melancholy, except specific to an object or place.

Also disposed to nostalgia were children sent to the countryside to nurse (who naturally missed their mothers), young men between 20 and 30, and women who left home to be domestic servants. Autumn was a particularly dangerous season, the falling leaves perhaps reminding marching soldiers of their impermanence and making them wonder why they were spending their limited time on this Earth bloodying their swords in distant lands instead of enjoying the comforts of home and hearth.

Apparently, almost anything under the sun could cause nostalgia. A too lenient education, coming from the mountains, unfulfilled ambition, eating unusual food, and love ("especially happy love," Roth's paper notes) could all bring on the disease. In the 18th and 19th centuries, some doctors were convinced nostalgia came from a "pathological bone" and searched for it to no avail.

French doctor Jourdan Le Cointe thought nostalgia should be treated by "inciting pain and terror." Some of the symptoms, victims presented with, are fairly logical--melancholy, sure; loss of appetite, okay; suicide, upsetting but understandable. But many other symptoms that were gathered under the umbrella of nostalgia almost certainly had causes other than homesickness--malnutrition, brain inflammation, fever, and cardiac arrests among them.

Other dubious cures tried over the years include leeches, purging the stomach, and "warm hypnotic emulsions," whatever that unspeakable horror might be. Doctors did sometimes go with the obvious solution of just letting the patients go home, which more often than not cleared their symptoms right up. But even that wasn't guaranteed to work, if the home they longed for had changed significantly or just no longer existed.

Obviously, the prevailing view on nostalgia has changed over the years, to the point where we now actively cultivate it with GIF-laden lists and VH1 specials, and rarely, if ever, die from it. But advice on treatment from French doctor Hippolyte Petit is as relevant to someone clinging to the past today as it was to a soldier driven mad by a milking song hundreds of years ago:

Sunday April 3rd, 2022

"Create new loves for the person suffering from love sickness; find new joys to erase the domination of the old." Or, just let it go. Among so many emotions in Job, nostalgia is front and center, at least in chapter 29. Job's words speak about what is, on the face of it desperate, and a bitter nostalgia for the past. But as we will hopefully discover; what he really longs for is beyond what he had to what could be paradise.

C.S. Lewis wrote,

Most people would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise. The longings which arise in us when we first fall in love, or think of some foreign country, or first take up some subject that excites us, are longings which no marriage, no travel, no learning, can really satisfy...There was something we grasped at, in that first moment of longing, which just fades away in reality. (Job the Wisdom of the Cross p.289)

The one lesson from longings is that it isn't about things or places we want, it is really a revelation of our hearts. It shows what we truly value and what we think will give our lives meaning. And what Job longs for is very telling. Sure, he would love to have his children back and his wealth and influence, but what does he state, is his longing? "Oh, that I were as in the months of old, as in days that God watched over me." (29:2)

It was the loving watchfulness of God over his life that Job valued most. Not for the blessings showered on him, but because of the fellowship he had with God. We often think of God's watchfulness as God smiling down on us from above. Numbers 6:24-26 reads these famous words, "The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."

You've probably heard these words many times as a benediction at the end of the service. For Job, however, God's watchfulness has become hostile; an unwelcomed intrusion into his life. Above all else, Job wants God's face to shine upon him and their relationship restored. Job's relationship with God, even in a lost and sinful world, meant Job could see where he was going. God's presence was a light unto his path.

Job's relationship with God influenced everything about his life. Verse 6 is an interesting verse that is out of context for us. Job says, "when my steps were washed with butter, and the rock poured out for me streams of oil." The word butter here is literally curds from the milk of goats. (Deut. 32:14) It refers to plentiful food and drink. We might think of it was the icing on a cake. The oil from rocks refers to receiving all that is needful for life.

Job longs for his relationship with God to no longer be marked by terror and suffering but he longs for the relationship to return to one of delight and celebration. What comes next though is very surprising. So often we think of the blessings of God in material ways. Most often in hedonistic ways, like fancy vacations and expensive cars. This is what is promoted by the "prosperity gospel".

A self-centered view of what blessings from God are all about. Job's vision of blessings from God are all about being a blessing to others. It is not self-centered at all.

God blesses us to bring his grace to a needy world. Job starts in his description of his longing, by recalling his former dignity. He talks about the gate of the city with its associated town square, where merchants and people gathered and mingled. It was here that the elders made judicial decision, and where government actions were decided and often acted on. It was a place that mattered, and people of substance and significance made a point of being present.

Picture it was a place where the ordinary folks stood on the edges among the merchants, and the princes and nobles gathered in the center. All the people who counted in the society were in the center. Picture now as one man enters. He makes his way to the center, to a seat reserved for him. The moment he is spotted a hush falls over the crowd. He doesn't have to ask for permission to squeeze through to his seat. The crowd simply parts for him.

Even the princes stop talking and all the nobles stay hushed. Here as the man enters, even the most prideful of people know to keep their peace. Job was like this man. At the very beginning of the book, he is called the greatest of all people of the east. But why was Job so honoured, so important? It is not for his wealth, or his nobility, or anything else we often admire in a worldly fashion. It was because of what Job did that people respected him.

Yes, he was a blessed man but he shared his blessings with others. One group in particular celebrated Job's arrival; the poor. Specifically, widows and orphans. People vulnerable to hunger and a lack of shelter. When Job arrived, hope swelled in their hearts. He embodied the grace of God and the grace we all long for.

However, Job's actions go even further. To those who are blind, and lame, who are exploited by the courts, or treated badly because they were strangers in the town: he became their advocates. Job says he put on the robes and turban of the judge, to defend the powerless. The dress of the judge is figurative, it is meant to tell us that Job's outward actions matched his heart. Job is said to defang or disarm those who exploited others.

Job longs to be restored not to wealth but to his role as a leader and champion for the exploited and oppressed. Does this not sound like someone else we know? Remember when Jesus silenced his critics but reminding them that he brought good news to the poor, sight to the blind and to make the lame walk. And also, to bring blessing to outsiders, or Gentiles. In thus doing this, Jesus was clearly the embodiment of the Kingdom of God.

Job ends yearning for the past and switches in verse 18-20 to yearning for the future. Job saw his future as one in which he dwelt in his nest until his days were over. He expected his branches or the aspects of his life to be well watered and full of life all his days. He expects his inner being as being strong and powerful to the end. The word glory here means literally liver, which is where many ancient people believed their inner being, or soul resided. Job thought this blessed life would not end with his death but persist forever.

Job returns to the city square in ending chapter 29. Job speaks now of the words he spoke to those who sought his counsel. His words were not only helpful, but were grace filled words. They were like spring rains renewing the life of the ground. When he speaks of the light of his face giving hope, he is not being arrogant.

Sunday April 3rd, 2022

He is saying that his face, his countenance was like God's countenance. Today we talk about this in terms of the incarnation. We become Christ for others. Job's longings for lost happiness has contained within them the seeds of his future destiny and certainly seeds of hope. One could be tempted to simply look at Job's life, or anyone's life, which was experienced suffering and think the best is over. Those days of happiness are gone forever. But we know this is not the case and Job proves this.

We know the best is not over, because we see at the very end of the book that this much longed for fellowship with God is restored. God even affirms Job as an honoured servant. We know the best is not over because the rest of scripture resonates this same yearning of God being expressed by kings and prophets and that expectation being met, time and time again. Job's longing for fellowship and leadership are a common theme in the bible.

We also know there is a fulfillment of this yearning because at the very beginning of creation, Adam delighted in walking with God in the garden. When creation is restored, we are assured this kind of intimacy with God will also be restored. We also know our yearnings will be met because we find their fulfillment in Jesus who incarnated a closeness with God that we all long for. Jesus' relationship was so close to God that every healing and every lesson, was a demonstration of the restoration of creation.

And one last thing to encourage us. Remember how Job wanted to return to a place of leadership and influence among his people. Well scripture tells us that all of us saved by the grace of Christ will be raised to rule and govern the new creation in Christ. The Apostle Paul sates, "Do you not know that the saints will judge (rule) the world? (1 Cor. 6:2) What Job experienced in a localized setting, and Adam in the garden, we will experience through Christ on a cosmic level.

This is the hope and longing Job expresses, but we are not yet at its fulfillment. Job is still not restored to his former status at the end of chapter 29. There is more yet to unpack before the conclusion. But I leave you with a powerful illustration of the truth now emerging from Job.

There are going to be broken times when you feel as if everything is under demolition. When things feel unresolved or ruined inside of you. When the only thing you might have the strength to do is three-quarters-of-the-way trust that God will take the broken pieces and glue them back together. That's called kintsugi. Kintsugi is a Japanese term that means "join with gold" or "golden seams."

If you were to break a jar and wanted to put it back together using the method of kintsugi, someone would take the jar and piece it back together with a glue that is mixed with powdered gold or platinum. It wouldn't be like superglue, where the item looks perfect because the glue is clear. You would see the gold in all the cracks.

You would know that the object has breaks in it. Those who practice kintsugi believe that just because something breaks doesn't mean it cannot be used anymore. It's not about perfection; it's about resilience. The once broken thing becomes more valuable because now there is gold binding the pieces together. [*Hannah Brencher, Fighting Forward: Your Nitty-Gritty Guide to Beating the Lies That Hold You Back, Zondervan, 2021.*](#)

Sunday April 3rd, 2022