

Look Back

Deuteronomy 6:21-25

I heard about a man who had retired, and he got up one morning and the first thing he did was read the obituary column to find out who had died. Well, on this particular morning he read that column and the newspaper by mistake had put his name in the column and reported that he was dead.

He was not only shaken he was irate. He called the editor of the newspaper and fussed him out. Finally the editor said, "I'll tell you what we'll do. In the morning we'll put your name in the birth column and give you a brand new beginning."

There really is something exciting about new beginnings. There's something exciting about a new year because you know it is a new beginning. There's something exciting about starting a new job because you know it is a new beginning. There's something exciting about moving into a new home because you know it could be a new beginning. There's something exciting about a new day because you know with it comes a new beginning.

Believe it or not, you can have a new beginning in your life more often than you think because a new beginning requires three simple, but different, looks. First of all, it requires a look back to see where you've been; it then requires a look around to see where you are; then it requires a look ahead to see where you need to go.

Now you can't really get to where you need to go until you know where you are. But you really cannot know where you are until you know where you've been.

Mickey Mantle was going to Yogi Berra's apartment one afternoon and he got lost. He stopped at a pay phone and called Yogi and said, "Yogi, I'm trying to find your apartment, where is it?" Yogi said, "Where are you now?" He said, "I'm at the corner of 5th and Main." Yogi said, "Well, just keep coming in this direction," and hung up.

The nation of Israel was less than a two-week journey from the promise land. They had been wandering in the wilderness for forty years, and they were now poised to cross the Jordan, conquer Canaan, and claim a new beginning. But before they did, Moses gives them "a blast from the past."

He asked them to open the vault of their memory, and remember what the Lord had done for them so that they could rejoice in what He was doing for them, and then receive what He would do for them.

Your memory is a very powerful tool. Your memory is capable of containing 100 bits of information, or 500 times the information contained in a complete set of encyclopedias. Your brain has 100 billion neurons, and 100 trillion connections for those memories, 46 ounces of memories in all, and that's if you're average.

There is a reason why God has given us this magnificent tool called a memory. The way to know that you can trust what God is doing today, and what God will do tomorrow, is to remember what God has done yesterday.

Before you can look to the future, and even live in the present, you must learn from the past. We need to do what Moses told the nation of Israel to do before they entered into the promise land.

I. Look Back At God's Providence Over Your Life

"...then you shall say to your son: 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand;...' (Deut. 6.21).

Israel was poised to cross the Jordan because of God's providence in her life. God had reached down with His mighty Hand and delivered Israel from the clutches of the most powerful nation on earth.

You can explain the providence of God in one single verse in the Bible-*Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."*

I can look back in my own life and see so many ways how God's providence has operated in my life.

In 1976, I was asked to preach the Spring Revival at Southcliff Baptist Church in Fort Worth where I was serving as Associate Pastor. This opportunity was highly unusual. A visitor from Monahans, Texas who was in town visiting his son and his family attended one of the Revival services. Glenn Ratliff heard me preach and asked if he could submit my name to the Pastor Search Committee of FBC Monahans. In September, I became pastor of this wonderful church for the first time.

You and I both can look back and begin to connect the dots of daily events that took place in our life and see a pattern. We can see life as different pieces of the puzzle somehow miraculously fitting together. These pieces are not circumstantial, nor are they accidental, they are providential. When you look back and see how God has worked in your life, you can know that God is working in your life, and will work in your life.

II. Look Back At God's Presence In Your Life

"...and the Lord showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household." Deut. 6:22

God wanted Israel to know not only was He real, but also He was there. He did it with signs and wonders. Remember that God never does a miracle for show. He never does it to get a thrill. He does it to manifest His presence and magnify His glory. Like the nation of Israel, we can see God every day, not just in the big things of life, but in the little things of life.

I heard about a little boy that came into the kitchen with his baseball glove and a ball. He said, "Mother, can I go out and play 'catch' before supper?" She said, "Sure, who are you going to play with?" He said, "God." She said, "How do you play catch with God?" He said, "Oh, I do it all the time. I go out in the backyard and throw the ball up to heaven and God always throws it back." Even in an act of gravity that little boy recognized the presence of God in his life.

Have you ever gotten a phone call, or a letter, or an e-mail, and it was exactly what you needed to hear or read at that particular time? We all have, and those are just tiny reminders of God's presence in our lives.

I want you to remember something. God is always present in your life; you just may not always be aware of it. *Jesus said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Mt. 28:20b)*

III. Look Back At God's Provision For Your Life

"Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers." Deut. 6:23

This phrase ***"He brought us out...that He might bring us in..."*** is one of the greatest phrases in all of the Bible. You see, God did not bring Israel out of Egypt to starve for a lack of food, or to thirst to death for a lack of water, or to die at the hands of some other enemy.

No, He brought them out that He might bring them in. Now I want you to remember whenever you are in trouble that God brings you out of trouble that He might bring you into triumph. The Apostle Paul said, ***"My God shall supply all of your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:19)*** God doesn't supply most of our needs, or many of our needs, He supplies all of our needs.

I promise you if you will take a moment to look back you can see ways that God provided for your life. My wife and I had saved enough money to get us through the first semester of seminary with her working on campus and my working a part-time job selling shoes in shoe store but we did not have enough money for my second semester tuition. On the day that my tuition was due, I went to the mailbox and in it was a check from a lady in a church where I had preached a Revival a couple of years before. The amount of the check was enough to finish paying my second semester tuition.

I could tell you story after story of how God has provided for my needs, but if you will look back you will see God's provision for your life.

IV. Look Back At God's Protection Of Your Life

"And the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day." (Deut. 6:24)

Israel's fate and Israel's future was in God's hands, and it is God that preserves and God that protects and God that provides.

You know we will be amazed, I believe, when we get to heaven to see how many times we were protected from death and didn't even know it. ***Ps. 68:20 says, "Our God is the God of salvation; and to God the Lord belong escapes from death."***

I can remember the closest I ever came to dying, I was 17 years old; I was going to see a girl I was dating. They were building another road near her home and sections of the old road had been removed but someone forgot to put up a barrier and detour sign. Suddenly when I topped a hill I realized that there was no road about 100 yards in front of me. I slammed on the brakes and the car began to slide toward a ditch and it flipped over and began to slide backwards down the ditch. Seatbelts were not mandatory then and I was not wearing one. I flipped over inside the car and land on the passenger side floor. A large pipe was in the ditch and the car slid into it and the pipe pinned the driver's seat to the steering wheel. If I had been in the seat I would have been killed instantly. When the car stopped sliding I climbed out without a scratch on me.

I knew immediately God had put His hand over that car, and God had protected me. It would amaze you how many times you were two minutes early, or two minutes late to a fatal automobile accident that could have been you, but God protected you.

It would be a great exercise for all of us to take the time to sit down and just reflect on the past, and to see God's providence over our life, God's presence in our life, God's provision for our life, and God's protection of our life; and see the reminders that come to us on a daily basis that the God that has worked in our past is the God that does work in our present, and will work in our future.

Let me tell you about a man named Ed. Almost every Friday evening, without fail, when the sun was going down, Ed would go to the beach to his favorite pier, carrying a bucket of shrimp.

He would walk out to the end of the pier as the sun was going down, and stand there with his bucket of shrimp, and begin to throw the shrimp in the water. Before long dozens of sea gulls would envelop him; their wings fluttering and flapping wildly. Ed would stand there tossing out shrimp to those hungry birds. If you were standing next to him you would hear him say, with a smile under his breath, "Thank you, thank you." After the bucket was empty Ed would just stand there, deep in thought, watching that golden globe going down behind the horizon.

Almost every Friday one of those sea gulls would land on his sea-bleached, weather-beaten hat, an old military hat that he had worn for years. Ed would finally make his way down to the end of the beach and go home.

You might think Ed was a weirdo, a few bricks short of a load, a sandwich short of a picnic, feeding those sea gulls with a bucket of shrimp.

But what you probably would not have realized is that this man's name was Eddie Rickenbacker. He was a famous hero back in World War II, and on one of his flying missions across the Pacific he and his seven-member crew went down. Miraculously, all the men survived; crawled out of their plane and climbed into a life raft.

Captain Rickenbacker and his crew floated for days on the rough waters of the Pacific. They fought the sun, they fought sharks, and most of all they fought hunger. On the eighth day all of their food ran out; all their water was gone; they were hundreds of miles from land, and no one knew where they were. They needed a miracle.

That afternoon they had a simple devotional service, and prayed for a miracle. They tried then to go to sleep. Eddie leaned back and pulled his military cap over his nose. All of a sudden he felt something land on the top of his cap.

It was a sea gull! Captain Rickenbacker would later describe how he sat perfectly still until the flash of his hand and a squawk of the gull, he managed to grab it and wring its neck. He tore the feathers off, and he and his crew made a meal of that sea gull. He then used the intestines for bait. With those intestines they caught fish which gave them food and more bait, and the cycle began. With that simple survival technique they were able to survive until they were found and rescued.

Eddie Rickenbacker lived many years after that ordeal, but he never forgot the sacrifice of that first sea gull. He never forgot how God provided that bird in his greatest hour of need, and he never stopped saying, "Thank you." That's why almost every Friday night he would walk out to the end of that pier with a bucket full of shrimp and a heart full of gratitude.

We ought to do the same thing this man did. Look back on your past, remember God's providence over your life, see God's presence in your life, think about God's provision for your life, rejoice in God's protection of your life. Get a blast from the past, and know that the God who worked yesterday, is surely working today, and will work tomorrow.