



ZWTF

Zapping You Whenever Thoughts Flow

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Looking anywhere but back.

Let us live for today with an eye toward the future..



“Now a different one also said, “I shall be following Thee, Lord! Yet first permit me to take leave of those in my home. Yet Jesus said to him, “No one, putting forth his hand on a plow and looking behind, is fit in the kingdom of God.”

—Luke 9:61-62

“The sun, it came forth over the earth when Lot, he came to Zoar. Then Yahweh, He caused sulphur to rain on Sodom and on Gomorrah, and the fire from Yahweh from the heavens. Thus He overturned these cities and the entire basin and all those dwelling in the cities, and everything sprouting from the ground. Yet his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a monument of salt.”

—Genesis 19:23-26

CHECK OUT THE NOW

In Scripture, returning to where we've been—even though God took us there as well as here—is rarely recommended. God is calling us ever forward. It's not that we don't have good memories of the past. We do; but the good is mixed with the bad. Bad memories can cripple our appreciation of the present. Even good memories are often bittersweet because they're gone. God has the cure for both the good and the bad of yesterday: look ahead to when we will be with Him, even while imbibing every scent of the present.

I am a champion of living for today. I am in good company, as our Lord recommended this course: “Take no thought for tomorrow,” He said. Animals already know this. We often pity animals, but in many ways they suffer less than we. They neither worry about the past, nor fret over the future. All they know is that they hunger and thirst and need a place to rest. Domesticated animals seek love. Jesus discouraged crystal ball gazing because it engenders worry. Certainly we are to anticipate His return and our own resurrection to immortality. We are to think upon the things He has guaranteed, but not upon all the bad or good things that *might* happen to us but probably won't.

Fear of the future paralyzes us. Our second-worst enemy is regurgitating the past. The past tasted bad the first time; the twentieth re-working of it is never an improvement. When it comes to the past, we are cows with four-part stomachs. We barf up foul-tasting memories and chew them until our jaws drop off. No one celebrates cows for their intelligence. The past is over and the future—with the exception of our coming glorification—is unknown. The Scriptural course belonging to peace lives right here, where God has set us for the day. From this secure camp, we can look ahead with confidence to where He has promised to deliver us.

Of all the terrible things we're able to imagine about

tomorrow, only a small percentage of them will happen. The odds are overwhelmingly in favor of none of them happening. As prognosticators, we suck. Even the bad things that we think will happen—and that do happen—never happen according to our grim blueprint. We may dread a hospital visit, but cannot anticipate the person there who will alter our lives for the better. Same with so-called good events. The wedding we've so meticulously choreographed comes to pass, but never in accord with the formula: the groom blows his lines; the bride trips over the runner; the ring-bearer wets his pants. So many unforeseen arrangements disrupt our scheming that we may as well cast our plans into God's lap and watch the circus.

of their own accord. Why hold a memory hostage when some new thing wants all of our concentration?

NEW THINGS

God is always calling us to walk through some miraculously-dry Red Sea bed, across a river Jordan to a promised paradise, up a mountain to where we will see Christ, or down into a hot, sparsely-populated valley where friends seem as rare as water. None of these great things are perfect, and none of the hard things come without mercies. You may think that the Israelites had jolly good fun crossing the rocky bed of the Red Sea, with the water standing up on either side of them. I doubt it. On the



FAUXTOGAPHS

We can scrutinize our lives away—even the present—and fail to see what's truly happening. I used to take photographs all the time. Now I consistently travel without my camera. When someone tells me in the midst of a magical moment: "You should take a picture," I always point to my head and say, "I just did." We are too bent, I think, on artificially preserving memories. Let these memories either hang on or go away

one hand, it was surely a thrill seeing water behave that way. On the other hand, the Egyptian army was hot on their heels. That figures. See? Something always screws up the "perfect" moment. Sorry to be a downer, but realism trumps misguided expectations. In the final analysis, "the substance of now" comforts. That both good things and bad come accessorized with their opposites keeps us relatively even and awaiting God's next move. Our highs aren't so high, and our lows are subject to happy modifications.

Moses ascended Sinai to meet God. Sounds good, right? Yes—if you can ignore the thunder, lightning, and scary angels buzzing your head. God invited Israel into a land dripping with milk, honey, and volleyball-sized grapes. Naturally, there was a problem: the inhabitants of that land were nine feet tall and ill-disposed to invading hordes of God-fearers. Israel dreaded the Sinai desert, but there God provided them miraculous food and drink, while impressively extending the warranties on their clothing and footwear.



PAUL GETS IT RIGHT

In Philippians 3:12-15, Paul speaks of pursuing that for which he was called. To do this, he must “forget, indeed, those things which are behind.” These behind things are both good and bad. Behind may have been fond memories of family—mother’s garden, father’s bakery, a childhood sweetheart. But for Paul, the past was also potentially a living hell. The Pharisee Saul persecuted the followers of Christ. He raided family homes, separated parents from children, and sentenced people to death. He supervised brutal scourgings. Startlingly, it is this same

man who, in 2 Timothy 1:3, writes, “Grateful am I to God, to Whom I am offering divine service from my ancestors with a clear conscience.” How could this former butcher’s conscience be clear? It should be mostly cloudy with a one-hundred percent chance of precipitation. He was forgetting, indeed, those things which were behind. Paul grasped justification by faith. He believed what God told him about his newness in Christ. Paul refused to look in his rear-view mirror, preferring rather to see his glorious self reflected in God’s eyes. This is the rare, God-given ability to walk by faith and not by perception (2 Corinthians 5:7). It is the key to happiness in this life. Here are the practical results of such a disposition:

- ▶ You will ignore the bad stuff that has happened to you.
- ▶ You will stop worrying about the bad stuff that *could* happen to you.
- ▶ You will contemplate the promises of glory that God has given you.

Am I able to do all three of these things all the time? No. I am rarely able to assemble any two of these marvels simultaneously. If I were ever able to execute the triple-play, I’m actually afraid of how good I might feel. I confess to you: there is some strange thing in me that resists complete happiness. Is it that I don’t trust any happiness short of immortality? Perhaps. Am I too cynical? Too damaged by past hurts? I don’t know. The corollary to resisting bliss is inviting misery. I don’t actively do this, but human beings do enjoy fondling their miserable little ruts. At least these ruts are safe and known; they’re *our* miserable little ruts. The quest for happiness is laden with pitfalls. How could such happiness—even if it existed—last? I often tell myself: *it is better to be happy and lose than never to be happy at all*. I sometimes don’t listen to myself. When I do listen, I’m the better for it. This is my point. By following God’s paths, we will always be happier than if we did nothing. Doing nothing may be safer, but it’s never better. “Playing it safe” is actually one of the riskiest things a person can do. Shall we appear before God having squandered His gifts? Having doubted His provision? Having chosen sight over faith? Having stiff-armed so many grand adventures? Having lived in fear all of our lives?

Let’s not. —MZ

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