

Where to Look

By RT Nusbaum

Looking Back

There is much written concerning this subject. Here are a few Scriptures that speak of looking or turning back.

Hebrews 11:15 says, "And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned."

Luke 17:31, 32 says, "In that day, he that shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not comedown to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife."

Luke 9:61, 62 says, " And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, no man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back , is not fit for the Kingdom of God."

Philippians 3:13, 14 says, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but his one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

All of these Scriptures speak of a possibility of turning back. Israel, while in the wilderness, continually threatened to go back to Egypt. The possibility of turning back to our old life is ever before us, though deliverance is a past, completed fact: *"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins: wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Among whom also we all had our conversation (manner of life) in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others"* (Ephesians 2:1-3).

If we become mindful of the life we had before, we might possibly return to it. It all depends on what our mind is full of. If we continually feed on the Word of God and the fellowship of the saints, we will press toward the mark of ever-learning Christ, our life. But if our mind begins to be taken with the cares of this life, then we walk on thin ice. We are to *"be conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind"* (Romans 12:2).

But there are more ways of turning back than just turning to sin. You can look back to religious things also. You can turn back to old experiences, trying to recapture them. Just

as we leave sin, so we blame these things. We must lay aside our old conceptions and experiences. We must find that *“old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God” (II Corinthians 5:17, 18).*

Our old, experienced, religious self is just as harmful as a sinful self. Both have limited God from doing a “new thing” (Isaiah 43:19). It is like pulling teeth to get us to forget those things which are behind. We have charted, diagrammed and categorized our Lord and left the providence of God and the freshness of walking in the light anew and afresh every day. I love the song, “Give Me That Old Time Religion”, but all it speaks of is going back.

I have heard people say, “Things sure ain’t like they used to be. God really did great things back then.” In reality, it is not the experiences they want to recapture, but the Christ who was so real at the time. But, the fresh Christ is not found in turning back but by pressing toward the mark.

You should not measure yourself and your spiritual state based on your past experiences. Nor should you measure the church you are now in to one you may have previously been in to find out how far you are or how short you have fallen. Do not be as those who measure themselves by themselves or by others. Christ is the measure, not the Christ of our past, but He who now is. We can find a jawbone of an ass and say, “Bless God, it worked for Samson, and it will work for me today.” It is not the instrument or the method we use that is important. If we pick up a jawbone against the enemy because we have seen it work before but the Spirit of the Lord does not come upon us, then it would be better if we threw it down and ran instead of standing our ground and being destroyed.

God told Moses to make a brass serpent and put it on a pole when in the wilderness. The people were being bitten by snakes so the Lord said that whoever would look on the brass serpent would recover. This foreshadowed the cross. It meant nothing in itself. God honored it because it represented what Christ would do at Calvary (John 3:14, 15). Speaking of King Hezekiah, many hundreds of years after Moses made the brass serpent, we read: *“He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehustan” (II kings 18:4-6).*

You see, the brass serpent worked once; it was given of God; the greatest man of Israel’s history made it with his own hands. Why not continue to use it? The people were looking back. Because of this, the thing that had been life for those in Numbers 21 had become idolatry for the next generations. Hezekiah was not looking at what had been but what was not. He took his place among the greatest of kings because he found the very real and present God who used very different things to accomplish his purpose. Hezekiah was not trying to conform Israel to the Israel of Moses’ day no matter what great things God had done for them. He broke up the idol of looking back and called it Nehushtan. He called it what it was: “A piece of brass.”

Just because God used something before does not mean that we will use it now. Do not lay the old things before Him expecting Him to bless them now. They might have been

good then and may well be good now, but He may have an altogether new direction for now. The old things that we keep shoving before Him may be the very things that stand in the way of progress and new direction for today. We cannot see what is before us, for we are too busy looking back trying to bring the old things forward.

Jesus himself told us plainly, “Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out”. ***