

When My Children Were About Me

For a couple of weeks now a phrase from Scripture has been working and re-working its way through my psyche. It is found in Job 29. Allow me to walk you through the context of this passage. Job has endured the worst form of physical, emotional and spiritual suffering anyone ever experienced until the passion of Christ. Leaving our Lord out of the equation, we have no more tragic documentation of suffering known to man. Toward the end of this human saga, Job laments: *"Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me"* (Job 29:2). Job was saying, "I wish I could go back to the place when God seemed to have taken care of me." He followed up that statement by saying, *"...and when by his light I walked through darkness"* (Job 29:3). Now he refers to the day when he had illumination and understood what God was up to. That's what he was ramifying when he said, *"As I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle"* (Job 29:4). We read in verse six, *"When I washed my steps with butter, and the rock poured me out rivers of oil"* (Job 29:6). In these words the patriarch reminds us he was not just comfortable -- he was very well off. Job then said, *"When I went out to the gate through the city, when I prepared my seat in the street! The young men saw me, and hid themselves: and the aged arose, and stood up"* (Job 29:7,8). From these words we see he was not only respected, he was famous in the world in which he lived. He mused, *"The princes refrained talking, and laid their hand on their mouth. The nobles held their peace, and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth. When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me"* (Job 29:9-11). Job was saying, there was a time when he talked, the world took notice and listened. Then finally Job said, *"Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him"* (Job 29:12). He is saying here, "When I saw hurting people I helped them. I helped people when no one else would."

The phrase that for the past few days has really illumined in my mind and heart is found in the middle of this lamentation as Job says, *"When the Almighty was yet with me, when my children were about me"* (Job 29:5). Of all the things he missed, he seems now to miss his kids the most. What do we know about his children? We know in the first chapter of Job he had seven sons and three daughters, ten children in total (Job 1:2). It seemed these young people loved to party (Job 1:4,13) and Job was convinced they were not living in a right relationship with the Lord, because the Bible says, *"And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually"* (Job 1:5). It is evident from the Scriptures that whenever these kids partied, Job sacrificed for their perceived sins. Whether kids do right or wrong, a parent always loves them. I hear the heart-cry of this

broken-hearted parent as he says, "... *when my children were about me*" (Job 29:5b). What does this cry say?

1. Nothing feels right about my children's absence.

As a pastor, there are sad times I have shared with people, but the saddest times are when parents bury their children. The order is interrupted. The natural order is as follows: we are born, we live our life, our kids are born, we leave a legacy for them, they take our values and inculcate them to their kids, our kids bury us, and the proverbial "beat-goes-on." However, when our kids exit this world before we do, life skips a beat. Forever the parent lives with an aching heart wondering what would have happened, had that child lived. When our parents go, we relish the time together, but we accept they had "their time." When a child dies, we feel terribly robbed and cheated. Furthermore, we feel the whole earth was robbed and cheated of their having lived a long full life and now they are not able to leave the lasting contribution they were intended to give to society. When parents hear the accomplishments of their children's peers, they always wonder, "what if...."

Sisera died in battle and without knowing the details, his mother sensing with her mother's intuition something was wrong, spoke of this worry in Judges 5:28, "*The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, "Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots?"* Even though years passed by, she never stopped listening for his chariot; it just doesn't feel right when your kid dies. Listen to the words of a poem a grieving mother wrote:

Feelings

I feel like I've just existed
And now it's been a year
I don't know how I've lived and breathed
Without you being here.
I know you lived your lifetime
As short as that seems to me,
But the pain in my heart is still so great,
Yet I know your spirit is free.
At times I think I hear you
The thoughts come to my mind.
I struggle for the sound of your voice,
But your voice I cannot find.

2. I want them back.

It is no comfort when you lose a loved one to hear someone say, "Well, you wouldn't bring them back for anything in the world!" Oh yes, we would! Granted, we would bring them back healthy and happy, but oh yes, they can enjoy Heaven later. This statement shows us the deep pain of having to give them up when the parent is definitely not ready. We can hear Job crying for God to turn the clock back when he says, "*Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days...*" (Job 29:2).

3. There was a time when we were close.

Job says, “... *when my children were about me*” (Job 29:5b). Job’s children were not the kind that ignored their dad, they were “about him” at one time. They laughed and cried together. If you put it in a modern setting, they had supper together, they were taken to AWANAs, music lessons and ball games. Mom and Dad came to recitals believing their kid playing the “not-so-quite-in-tune” instrument was the best performer of the night (by far). They celebrated their graduation and...and now the parents only imagine what the wedding pictures would have looked like, if only they had made it to that demarcation. The parent longs to be as close to those grandkids as they were to their own.

4. If I could have them back I would try again.

Every parent who ever had a kid make bad decisions and mess up their life lives with angst wondering what they could have done differently to dissuade their children from the wrong and encourage them to do right. For parents in this situation, you need to realize, Job was the most righteous man in the earth but had adult kids that did wrong. This is documented in Job 1:8, “*And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?*” How much better a person could he have been? Isaac and Rebekah had twin sons, Jacob and Esau. There could not have been two more different men in the universe, yet the same parents. Kids grow up and make their own decisions. All we can do as parents is provide a lasting influence. We do need to be reminded that God does not ultimately hold the parent responsible for the bad decisions of an adult child, otherwise the Bible would never have verses such as, II Chronicles 25:4, “...*It is written in the law in the book of Moses, where the LORD commanded, saying, The fathers shall not die for the children, neither shall the children die for the fathers, but every man shall die for his own sin.*”

In most cases, Christian parents did the best they could have done. We need not regret doing our best and wonder if it was good enough. If you obeyed the light God gave you, stay strong and pray what you put in them was taken to heart (Proverbs 22:6).

5. Treasure every moment you have now.

On a positive note to parents who still “have their children about them,” enjoy and bless God for everyday and every hour you have with your kid! Don’t wish they were older -- that day will come far faster than you have anticipated. “*Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth*” (Proverbs 27:1). We are not promised tomorrow; all we have is today. Love them while you can, speak to them now, pray with them now, teach them now. Don’t put off to tomorrow what you can do today!

-Pastor Pope-

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