

**EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH**  
**SUNDAY, AUGUST 15, 2021**  
**SERMON: PUT THE PAST BEHIND YOU!**  
**TEXT: JOSHUA 1:1-9**

There is a saying that goes “you can never go back.” The idea that no matter how good the past has been to you, you can never relive the glory days. The fact of the matter is...nothing stays the same!

I learned this the hard way. While I was in seminary, I found myself struggling with what to do with my life, basically “what to do when I grew up!” I was in my late 20’s and could not settle on a career choice. The one path that seemed the clearest, being a pastor, I was fighting tooth and nail. I am a “pastor’s child” and had seen the good, the bad, and the ugly of a pastoral ministry. I enjoyed music and performing and had experienced being a performer for several years, but nothing was really happening on that front. I found myself lost and landed in Branson, MO. Branson was known in the 90’s as the live music theatre capital of the US. My brother was going to college down there and when he was back on spring break, I decided to pack up and move down there with him. He had secured a job for me, and we found a place to live together.

During my time in Branson, I had the opportunity to visit Jeffersonville, IN which is part of the greater Louisville KY area. It was where we lived when my father was doing his studies in the 80’s and where I attended all four years of high school. I was still struggling with my future plans and I had thought that maybe, if I moved back to the Jeffersonville area, life would be good. I had great memories of Southern Indiana and Louisville. The church my father pastored was a great experience for me during my teen years. I was active in the church and, up to that point, felt that it was truly “home.” I had friends there, my choir teacher was a mentor to me in music. Jeffersonville, to me, was the perfect place to be! I had a few days off from

a job I was doing in St. Louis and made the 4 hour drive over to Jeffersonville. I was so excited because it was the weekend and I was looking forward to going to our former church and maybe looking up some of my high school friends...it had been 10 years since I had been there!

I arrived at church on Sunday morning, brimming with excitement, only to walk in and be treated like a stranger. No one recognized me! It wasn't until one of the elder ladies who use to give all of us kids packaged of gum on Sunday looked at me and said my name. What a let down! Many people that I knew from church had moved on. I was looking forward to dropping in on my high school choir conductor and maybe singing with the choir during their rehearsals. I hadn't even considered that he had retired several years before. I then realized that my friends had moved on and no one lived where they use to. All my preconceived dreams and notions went crashing to the ground. I became a bit depressed and packed up my car and went back to Branson. God had taught me an important life lesson! ***You can never go back!*** Very little remains the same. You either move forward or you come to a standstill.

Looking back is great for reliving fond memories, but it will very rarely improve your current situation. The business world has shown us that you must stay relevant and moving forward to be competitive. We are certainly glad that the world of medicine has moved on from leeches, lobotomies, and electric shock therapy. It is a lesson we must learn in the church as well. Far too often we "rest on our laurels" and remember the good old days that seem so good to us. This is a trap that can prevent us from moving forward.

Today we begin a new series based in the book of Joshua. Joshua is an extraordinary book for us to learn from. On one level it is about ancient history. A man is called by God to lead his people into the promised land. On another more personal level, it becomes personal as we see a story of

promise and expectations that God has for us. God takes on the role of a coach, mentor, teacher, pastor who is excited about what we can become if we are obedient to Him and use the gifts that He has given us.

Let's begin by listening to our scripture lesson which is Joshua 1:1-9:

**1 After the death of Moses the LORD's servant, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant. He said, <sup>2</sup> "Moses my servant is dead. Therefore, the time has come for you to lead these people, the Israelites, across the Jordan River into the land I am giving them. <sup>3</sup> I promise you what I promised Moses: 'Wherever you set foot, you will be on land I have given you— <sup>4</sup> from the Negev wilderness in the south to the Lebanon mountains in the north, from the Euphrates River in the east to the Mediterranean Sea<sup>[a]</sup> in the west, including all the land of the Hittites.' <sup>5</sup> No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. For I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will not fail you or abandon you.**

**<sup>6</sup> "Be strong and courageous, for you are the one who will lead these people to possess all the land I swore to their ancestors I would give them. <sup>7</sup> Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the instructions Moses gave you. Do not deviate from them, turning either to the right or to the left. Then you will be successful in everything you do. <sup>8</sup> Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do. <sup>9</sup> This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."**

As we read the biblical account, we know that Joshua was the right-hand man for Moses for forty years as the Children of Israel wandered in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt. We first read about him in Exodus

17 as one of Moses' generals as they fought the Amalekites and then we in Exodus 24 and 32 he is called an 'assistant.'

We know that Joshua was one of the 12 spies sent initially into the promised land to see what the people would be facing. He and Caleb were in the minority as they encouraged the people to enter the land and the other ten spies discouraged it and were fearful of the outcome. Joshua knew that the task of taking the land would be huge...but had faith that God would lead them to victory as God had promised. You might say that this was the first battle that Joshua lost. The people sided against their leaders and God punished them for their faithlessness by making them wander the Sinai wilderness for 40 years and none of that generation, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, were allowed to enter the land of promise.

Once again, the Children of Israel, have been brought to the banks of the Jordan. The time is at hand to take possession of the promised land and Joshua faces a crisis! Moses, due to his own disobedience, is not allowed to enter the promised land and is, in fact, dead. Joshua is in mourning! The weight of the leadership now passes to an individual who probably enjoyed not being the one in charge. He is stuck in the past, wishing that Moses was still there to take charge and God intervenes! The Lord addresses Joshua directly:

**“Moses my servant is dead. Therefore, the time has come for you to lead these people, the Israelites, across the Jordan River into the land I am giving them.” (1:2)**

Joshua has qualities that God wants to use! God has chosen Joshua. Joshua has been groomed for leadership by one of the greatest leaders known to humankind. Everything Joshua has gone through, the victories and the defeats, has prepared him for this very moment! God's timing is always correct and perfect. There is only one small problem. Joshua is not quite sure about all this! Joshua is living in

the past brought on by the death of Moses and his own mourning. You must wonder is Joshua is in the mindset of wondering how things could have been different if Moses was alive. Perhaps he is stuck in the “could have been...should have been dilemma of looking back on the past.” God decides to break into his past ponderings and get him focused on the only thing that matters...the present with a view to the future!

***“Joshua, quit mourning! Moses is dead! You are the one I need now! It is time to move on!”***

This divine intervention is just what Joshua needs to realize he is God’s new chosen leader. God has invested in him and he has enormous potential!

In personal life or in ministry, very little is accomplished by living in the past. The past should be acknowledged, respected, even examined and analyzed, but there is no point in trying to relive it or capture it. This leads us to being ineffective in the here and now.

This wasn’t just an Old Testament dilemma. Jesus addressed idea when he spoke in Luke 9:62:

**“Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God.”**

You would think if anyone had a right to think that the best was behind him, Paul writes these words from jail, not long before he is beheaded:

**...Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. (Phil. 3:13-14).**

Forget the living in the good memories of the past...are you saddled with baggage of bad memories that are causing you to falter in you daily life and ministry today?

If you are limiting your God-given potential because of lies from your past...you need to be reminded that God knows you , loves you, sees you, and is to transform you regardless of negative experiences or past sin. If you compare yourselves to others – you need to stop! God looks at you for you. He has invested in you and sees great potential. He is not sizing you up based on others around you. You are unique, known, and loved by God.

I am sure that Joshua admired Moses. What wasn't there to admire? He was a man among men – one of a kind. Moses had his struggles. He was a murderer; he ran away from his assignment. He felt his flaws would only hamper God's will. He disobeyed God. God still used Moses in a mighty way.

As you seek to fulfill your God-given role in His Kingdom, live in the now and look to the future. What does God expect of us? Listen to the words of the prophet Micah (6:8):

**<sup>8</sup>No, O people, the LORD has told you what is good,  
and this is what he requires of you:  
to do what is right, to love mercy,  
and to walk humbly with your God.**

We are to walk humbly. What is true humility? Humility is having a right estimate of your own powers. When we don't identify and respect the gifts and talents that God has given us, the gifts and talents that God **expects** us to use, then we need to see if we have to put the past behind us and look towards the future.

The opening of Joshua stresses the importance of living with our backs to the past. Think about God's message to Joshua...

***"Moses, my servant is dead. Now therefore, arise..!"***

Are we willing to live with our backs to the wall? As Eastside Community Baptist Church, are we willing leave the past behind and look toward the future? It may sound strange but moving forward means to leave both the negative and the positive in the past. We can learn from both failures and successes; but, at the same time, even our past successes can prevent us from moving forward and hold us captive.

May we remember that anyone who is in Christ is a new creature; old things have passed away. Everything is new in Jesus Christ.

Let's pray...