

[1 Pompeii] Bastille named the song we heard this morning “Pompeii.” This title fits pretty well if you know the history of this city Pompeii. Pompeii was a city under Roman rule, right where you might imagine a belt buckle on Italy, the boot. It was a bustling metropolis with fertile lands, a rockin’ economy, and beautiful architecture. In 62 AD, Pompeii and surrounding cities suffered a debilitating earthquake that had left the area in shambles. For the next 17 years, people stayed and tried to rebuild their “city that they loved.” But in 79 AD the volcano, Mount Vesuvius, had a massive explosion and caught everyone off guard. The entire city, roughly estimated at 20,000 people, was caught in up to 20 feet of ash that fell in a matter of about 6 hours. But that’s not what actually killed them. It was the heat that surged through vents in the volcano, reaching out about 6 miles at 250 degrees that killed the Pompeians.

For these people, it was the end of the world. Why would Bastille write a song about a city that was destroyed 2,000 years ago? And why would that song be so popular? Well, obviously, we can’t relate to a volcano destroying our city, but a lot of us know what it feels like to have our worlds blow up. We all have our Vesuviuses, those things, or events, or people that make us feel like it’s the end of the world, that we are getting buried in 20 feet of ash or in a heat surge.

[2 Timeline] We’re just living our lives and then BOOM...our Vesuvius erupts. A pink slip in the inbox at work. Papers awaiting my signature. An empty nest. For those of us who have the “drama queen’ gene, the end of the world may happen more frequently for us. But it makes us want to ask, just like in the song, “How am I gonna be an optimist about this?” How can I face these things that are my Vesuviuses? A lot of times we just wish ourselves out of it. We look BACK. We start to think of the days before Vesuvius as the “the glory days” when times were different...better...it wasn’t the end of the world. In fact, everyone has heard someone pining for the “good ol’ days.” That’s a sure sign someone has lived through a Vesuvius. [3 Glory Behind] They look back to the time before...whatever it was...and wish they could get back there. The “glory days” implies that today, for them, isn’t so glorious. I mean, it’s in movies and commercials. It’s used in conversations. Even though we know we can’t go back, we really wish we could. We’re convinced that life was better BACK THERE, in the BACK in the Glory Days.

[4 Glory Ahead] But what if we’re looking the wrong way? What if our best days aren’t behind us? Would you believe it if I told you that the glory days aren’t back there? That God promises the GLORY DAYS are AHEAD of us?

When we feel like our Vesuvius is weighing its ash down on us and we are at the end, pining for the good ol’ days, God is there in the midst, simply hoping we will find what He is saying, the Glory Days are ahead of us.

Man that is so easy to say when I am not feeling buried right now. However, some of us are at points in our lives now where it’s a miracle we have gotten out of bed. Our world is ending. Our Vesuvius has exploded. Just like Sprang sang, if we close our eyes, we can feel like nothing has changed at all. When our world is crashing down

around us, that's exactly what we want...we want to hide from it all....in a safe place maybe in our past, to avoid having to move forward, avoid the present, pretend nothing has changed. And sometimes the hiding itself can give us a false sense that it is a safe place for us in the midst of our end. We hide behind our glory days-we allow the safety of that memory to creep on us-when the streets were still secure, the kids were all respectful, when our marriage was loving, when people weren't crazy and they loved their mommas. ...back when this, or that.

I am just as guilty. I unfortunately was not cool at all in high school....well, at least the first 3 years of high school. Up until my senior year, I was a band nerd who didn't have cable or anything name brand. My car squealed when I started it up next to my friends' new Mustangs. But then, ahhh, my glorious senior year. I don't talk about this often, but you are actually looking at the 1997 head drum major for the Texas State 4A marching band competition!!!! I just happened to have a copy lying around so I brought it with me...Do you want to watch a little bit of it? Ok great!

(VIDEO - Shelley's Glory Days)

I know! So awesome. I also was voted Band Sweetheart. And I was voted best personality for the whole senior class...and runner-up for best hair! And I was a school mentor. And I lead a growing Bible study at my house. And...I had a boyfriend!!!

BEST. YEAR. EVER.

Then my Vesuvius exploded-I went to college.

I know... doesn't sound so bad. But I'm telling you, for Drum Major Shelley, the world ended when high school ended...

Because at college, no one knew about Drum Major Shelley. And the few who did know couldn't have cared less.

I actually really struggled that year to figure out who I was. I had this amazing senior year and none of those things were credits I could take with me to a 4 year college! Let alone a college that didn't even have a marching band! I was lost. To me, an 18 year old who just left home and the familiarity of life, my world was seemingly ending. [5 Shelley's Glory Days] I kept reliving my senior year...thinking back over the glory days. I would go home and watch the video, ask...ok, force my new friends to watch it with me. I eventually saw that they didn't even really care and they were my good friends. No matter how badly I wanted to, I could never go back to Drum Major Shelley. I could never recapture my glory days. The Vesuvius of graduating, of growing up, had erupted and my life as I had known it was over.

Now I know that my experience of it feeling like the end of the world is a young girl's example. I know many of you have gone through much deeper burns made by your Vesuvius. I mean, it's easy to tell a 19 year old college kid that things get better. But is that really true for a bitter marriage? A loved one gone too soon? A rebellious kid? How about a lost job? I tell you 'God's not done with you,' that your best days are in front of you and you think 'Yeah right. There's no way.' When we feel buried in the ashes of our life, we just want to close our eyes. But y'all, God IS still working. Even in those moments.

If THAT's hard for us to believe, we're not the first. God's people have long struggled to believe our best days are ahead of us.

[6 Exodus] One of the most popular Old Testament stories is that of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt. From the plagues God had Moses bring upon the Egyptians to the Red Sea parting, it's all a great story. So great that Hollywood has done adaptations of it for many years. My personal favorite is "The Prince of Egypt." I like it so much because with animation, you can do amazing things. Like when the Israelites are all walking on the Sea floor and the lightning flashes and they see the fish that are swimming right next to them. When the fire comes from the heavens and blocks the Egyptians from catching up with the Israelites!! The 40 years that followed turned that story into the Glory Days. They would spend those years wandering about in the wilderness, grumbling about the "Promised Land" they thought they would receive immediately.

For hundreds of years, this story was the Israelites' favorite story too. It was their "We won State" story. Whenever they were under attack, they looked back to the Exodus (Remember how great THAT was?). Whenever they had a leader who wasn't up to snuff. (Remember how great Moses was?) Whenever they didn't sense God's presence. (Remember when God did that?) They knew how cool it was. They've showed their friends the VHS tape over and over. They continually look back to the Exodus out of Egypt...their "glory days."

But God speaks to Israel in Isaiah 43. If you have a Bible, turn with me to verses 18-21. This is like 800 years AFTER the Exodus. Israel has been conquered by another empire-Babylon this time, rather than Egypt. As you can imagine, Israel is pining for the glory days. The Vesuvius of Babylon has exploded and destroyed their culture, their entire way of life, and they're looking back to the days of Moses, wishing they had a God like the God who parted the Red Sea. But listen to what God promises them. I really like the way The Message phrases this passage so that's what I am going to read today.

"Forget about what's happened;
don't keep going over old history.
Be alert, be present. I'm about to do something brand-new.
It's bursting out! Don't you see it?"

There it is! I'm making a road through the desert,
rivers in the badlands.
Wild animals will say 'Thank you!'
—the coyotes and the buzzards—
Because I provided water in the desert,
rivers through the sun-baked earth,
Drinking water for the people I chose,
the people I made especially for myself,
a people custom-made to praise me. " -- Isaiah 43:18-21

[7 Exodus - Exile - Question] "Be alert, be present, I'm about to do something brand-new." God is chastising the Israelites for not seeing the now. They are so preoccupied with the crazy cool stuff that God did for them, now many years ago, that they can't even open their eyes to see the brand-new cool things He is doing now. According to God, Israel's glory days aren't BEHIND them...they are AHEAD!. "Turn around!" he says. Our nature is to turn back to those things that were so glorious. But when we do, we miss, the Israelites missed, the new things He was doing for them. (8 Back to Oasis) God is saying "You ain't seen nothing yet!" but they were so preoccupied with the past during their Vesuvius walk through the desert that anything God did was going unnoticed. In fact, to drive his point home, He adds a little personification in there and says "All these crazy animals are even saying thank you to me!"

So how can we keep from becoming an Israelite who focused so much on what was that they couldn't see what God was doing NOW? Because again, that's human nature. We are naturally drawn to the things in our past that were glorious, that added to us and helped us to feel that "Just Won State" feeling. Truth is, we like those big moments. Those help define us. They feel comfortable to us, like sitcoms where everything is resolved in 30 minutes. We can look back on the glory days and feel like a million bucks, feel like we know God was with us.

But God is not the God of people who peaked in high school. God is doing a NEW thing. It isn't a promise of a grand sign sent from the heavens....sometimes that does happen...but God's words here are clear. By Him simply asking the Israelites "Don't you see it?" we know they haven't. We know they have closed their eyes and tried to act like it was where they'd been before, remembering the glory days at the Red Sea...just like our song, Pompeii. We see that the quieter, slower ways that God was working were not enough for the Israelites.

So what is God saying to us here? For the Israelites, who knew they were God's people, they were using their history, their past, to try and show God how He COULD be coming to their aid right then. How he COULD be performing all these wondrous miracles for them, His chosen people. The Exodus out of Egypt was supposed to lead to the promised land. In their human minds it had only led to wandering in the wilderness.

BUT all along, during this journey through the desert, He WAS doing these miracles, they just chose not to pay attention to the brand new way He was leading them. They were too focused on the past to see their present as anything but a Mount Vesuvius. And all along, He was slowly and subtly turning the wilderness into the Promised Land.

WE can't close our eyes the way Israel did. When we are facing our Vesuvius, our wilderness, God is there and ready, always doing a new thing. When we close our eyes, when we look back, we miss it. We miss the little subtleties, the slow and steady ways He is guiding us to see that our wilderness is becoming a promised land.

[9 Glory Days, New Glory] Well, it's easy to miss those things when we compare it to our history, the glory that WAS there. The little things don't seem near as cool as our Glory Days. The small ways God comes through for us many times go unremembered when our Glory Days are what we long for.

But God says the Glory Days are ahead of us.

God is ahead of us.

So how did God come through? He made this great speech trying to get the Israelites to pay attention and be present. SO what cool stuff did He do for them? Well, there's just the coolest thing ever, Jesus. (Who, by the way, did NOT come with pomp and circumstance the way the Jews imagined, but quietly and lowly in a barn without fanfare.) But that took so long. None of those folks even knew Jesus! Yes. But THIS is what God is saying. Jesus IS God. God's plan was to live among his people. In the Exodus, God came, did a big miracle and led them out. After the Exile, they were wondering where God was. In Jesus, God says, I am with you. Always and forever. That's what Glory Days are... the name "Glory Days" implies that's when it's good, that's when God is with us - GLORY. But God tells us I am with you NOW. I am doing a new thing NOW. The Glory Days are where God is and GOD. IS. WITH. US. Now. Now. NOW. These are the glory days. Not because they're perfect. But because God. Is. With. Us.

It all worked out for me in the end, too. I have to admit that I have never been given a trophy like that since. I haven't had that Glory Days feel since 1997. But I stayed in college and met some great people. I decided to marry one of them. Not the most spectacular thing ever-lots of people get married. Except for me, Brad is evidence that God is with me. God teaches me and shapes me and invites me to look more like Jesus through Brad. I became a teacher. Again, evidence that God is with me as I love on my students. I had kids. God is evidenced in everyday they amaze me as they grow. Small things...but man, all these things add up to be such a cool life...I can look back and see how God was in those things, those events, even when I felt

like I was wandering in the desert for some of them. Even, when they didn't give me the "Just won State" feeling, God was in those days, those Glory Days for me. In those steps in my journey since my Glory Days, have I kept my eyes open? Because God is with me. Have I looked for God when Vesuvius was covering me with ash? I could see God is with me. Did I pay attention to the subtleties that were proof He was still with me? Was I present there, in those dark moments, and not wishing for better days? God. Was. STILL. With. me.

I just don't know. I know I did a lot of looking back to a place where I felt like I had just walked out of the Red Sea. We are programmed to look back. It's our human nature. But y'all, God is doing a new thing, NOW. In this moment God is doing something brand new. We can't get caught in the past, no matter how glorious things were. God, who, by His very nature IS glorious, is here and present now.

I want to challenge y'all to meditate this week, to try each day to stop and quiet yourself. When you walked in, there should have been a card on your seat. If you didn't get one, we have plenty so you can grab one at the back on the way out. This card has a piece of our scripture today. It says,

**"Forget about what's happened;
don't keep going over old history.
Be alert, be present. I'm about to do something brand-new.
It's bursting out! Don't you see it?"**

Many times meditation is a spiritual practice overlooked by Christianity. We hear of it used in Eastern cultures as a way to sit quietly and EMPTY yourself of every distraction. Christian meditation is the opposite. It is an opportunity to sit quietly with our God and FILL ourselves with Him. It is a chance to daily turn back to God when our nature is pulling us to look to the past. This week, consider creating a daily routine that includes mediation. This will look different for all of us-just a small break from your day...a peaceful spot for you...where you deliberately focus on this verse and reflect on its meaning, expecting God to FILL you. Use this card as a guide and reminder that whatever glory you are holding onto in your past is not near as glorious as what God has in store for you right now.

We are going to end with a prayer of Examen. Just an opportunity for you to think and pray over a few questions that are shown here on the screen.

1. What have you defined as your "glory days"?
2. How can you practice looking ahead for the new thing God is doing?
3. Will you commit to meditation, a filling of God, this week?

if you're new to catalyst, we know it's difficult to get connected to a church and so we have designed an experience just for you called NewComer's Lunch. We have one that's happening today so you can stick around if you want. Or if you aren't prepared to stay today, or next one is August 16. You can mark that you're interested on the tear off and drop that in the box on your way out.

Catalyst, may we be a people who are looking ahead to our Glory Days, in search of a new thing and know that the God who called us to do that, will be with us there.