Look Forward to Going Back to the Good Old Days

Revelation 22:1-5
Saints Triumphant (C)

If only we could go back to the good old days! Do you ever feel that way? This world seems to be getting worse and worse. You read about it online. You hear about it on the radio. You see it on the news every night. You experience it in your own life. If only we could go back to the good old days when people were polite, children showed respect and you could get a decent cup of coffee for a quarter. Aaah…the good old days…when neighbors knew one another, kids played outside from dawn ‘til dusk and there were still television shows that could genuinely be called “wholesome.” The good old days…when you knew your butcher by his first name and kids called adults by their last names. Aaah…the good old days…

It is easy to wax nostalgic about days gone by, to remember them fondly and long for a return to that time and place. I wonder, though, how often we whetwash the past just a bit. It seems all too easy to remember only the good parts of the past and forget about some of the challenges, troubles and difficulties of the past. Sure, I played outside all day with my brothers, even in the winter. But, we also froze fairly often because putting your feet in plastic bags and then into poorly insulated boots was not exactly perfect protection against the cold of a Wisconsin winter. Sure, our parents didn’t have to worry about the dangers of the internet. But, we also had to travel all the way to a library to find information for a research paper. Sure, we didn’t have the temptation of too much screen time watching T.V. and playing games on our Xbox or Ipod. But, we also had to get up and walk all the way across the room to change to one of the other two channels available.

I’m sure if we sat down and studied it we would conclude that there were some good things about the good old days and there were some not so good things about the good old days. I will leave it to you to decide how today and the good old days balance out.

I. The Good Old Days Ruined

However, I CAN tell you that there was a time in the history of our world that can TRULY be called the “good old days.” We could even call them “the perfect old days.” I am talking about those blissful days enjoyed by Adam and Eve before their tragic fall into sin. I have often heard people ask why a good God would create a world with so many problems and so much pain. The simple answer is: He didn’t. He created a world of perfect harmony, perfect beauty, perfect peace, perfect pleasure, perfect joy, perfect enjoyment, a perfect relationship between two perfect people in a perfect Paradise. Sounds pretty good, doesn’t it? It sounds like the kind of place worth pining for.

Which is why we do. We all do. There is a reason people are unhappy with the way things are in this world. And the reason is that things are not the way things are supposed to be in this world. When our first parents rebelled against their Creator they brought a curse on this world. We see the results of that curse all around us. We see it in the way things decay and rust and are ruined. We see it in the way nature sometimes brings destruction such as the typhoon in the Philippines. We see it in the way animals devour one another. We see it in the way people can be so cruel to helpless animals. We see it in the way people can be so cruel to one another. We see it in the way people’s hearts are broken. We see it in the way our own selfishness and impatience and lack of love. We see it in the way we all face the ultimate ending of death.

Should I go on? Am I being too negative? Not according to God’s Word. The Bible is quite honest about the realities of this sin-ruined world. But, the Bible insists that we are not without hope. The Bible insists on a happy ending.

II. The Good Old Days Restored

It is interesting that both J.R.R. Tolkien (author of The Lord of the Rings) and C.S. Lewis (author of The Chronicles of Narnia) believed that the reason fairy tales are so universally popular is NOT because they are so fantastic but because they are so close to the reality of this world. Fairy tales tell stories of helpless people in hopeless situations who are rescued and who live happily ever after.

That’s us! We were helpless people in a hopeless situation, facing sure and certain death – a death our sins rightly deserve – when suddenly, our Prince, our King, our Jesus rescued us by His selfless sacrifice on the cross. And the Bible promises that, because of what Jesus did, we will live happily ever after.

The Bible is the story of how the Creator of this world went about restoring His creation after it had been ruined by sin. In the first chapter of the Bible it describes God’s creation of the world. It was perfect. In the third chapter of the Bible it describes how God’s creation was ruined. In the final two chapters of the Bible, St. John describes a vision he had of the new world God will one day give His people. We are living in between. We are
still living in the old, ruined world but we are looking forward to the new, perfect world God promises His people. Here is part of St. John’s vision of that perfect world:

*Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3 No longer will there be any curse.*

No longer will there be any curse! None of the effects of sin will be there. Can you think of some examples of what that will mean? No sniffles. No sadness. No selfishness. No cruelty. No cancer. No frustration. No feebleness. No fear. There will be no worries or weariness. There will be no anger or abuse. There will be no death. John saw the water of life flowing from the throne of God because all true life comes from God. It will be a never-ending stream of life. John saw the tree of life there. Way back in the Garden of Eden God had planted the tree of life. But, once they fell into sin they were not allowed to eat of it because God in His mercy did not want them to live forever in this cursed world. But, in THAT world we will eat from the tree of life and live forever.

Many, many things from this world will NOT be in THAT world. But, do you know what WILL be there? Do you know WHO will be there? St. John says, “The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.” We will be in the presence of the living God. We will be able to look Him in the face because we will be without sin and without shame. We will have no reason to hang our heads or tremble in fear. We will finally see the smiling face of our Father. Like Adam and Eve before the fall into sin, we will walk with God.

Aaaah…the good old days. I’m not sure whether our memories of the good old days are accurate. But, I am sure that we cannot go back to the 1950’s or 60’s or 70’s or whenever the good old days supposedly were. However, as followers of Jesus Christ, we CAN and WILL experience a world as perfect as the one our first parents enjoyed. When things look grim, when this world gets you down, rather than looking back, look forward. Look forward to when our Creator makes all things new again. Look forward to when the good old days will go on forever. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria*