

Bless the Broken Road

Hey welcome to Amazing Love during our series called Playlist, and I hope you have enjoyed it thus far. You have come to the conclusion of the series, but if you missed and want to catch up feel free to go online, or download our Amazing Love app and watch from there.

You know there are a lot of stories about being lost, but one of my favorites happens to be from the movie Dumb and Dumber. These two characters Lloyd and Harry are driving to Aspen to return a briefcase to one who has lost it, and as they travel in their dog mobile, Lloyd takes over driving for Harry. But while Harry is sleeping Lloyd takes the wrong exit which leads them in the exact wrong direction. What makes this funny is that all the while Lloyd is proud of himself, bragging to Harry about how well he did. Until it's found out he led them in the wrong direction. I could tell you how he totally redeems himself by selling the dogmobile for a scooter. But the point of it is this. *You can be completely lost without even knowing it.* Be going the complete wrong direction and you didn't even have a clue, all the while proud of where you were leading.

Reminds me of the difference between those with an innate sense of direction and those who don't have such a thing. Where are my people with an innate sense of direction. Like even right now you know where north, south, east and west is. You go there once and you know how to get back, you know how to read a map, or you listen to your gps. And then there are those who don't have this sense of direction, I won't ask for a raise of hands and you don't have to elbow your neighbor, but maybe you've been led by one of them before.

I remember driving with brother in law. We were both working at church summer camp. And it was his turn to drive home after a brutally long day. The church is up here. Disney is over here, and our home is over here. I was so exhausted I tried to get some shut eye, and I wake up and I see all these signs for Disney and it dawns on me, an already long day has just been made at least an hour longer because we have been driving in the wrong direction. But my brother in law didn't know. Because you can be lost and not even know it. He's a great man by the way just not with the sense of direction.

Which leads us to our song for today. We have a selection, an oldie but a goodie from Rascal Flatts called Bless the Broken Road. And the lyrics they say this, "I set out on a narrow way many years ago....But I got lost a time or two." Now the singer here was talking about driving but relationships. Times when he knew where he wanted to get to, but got lost. And I think just as you can get lost in relationships, in life, on the road. So it can also happen with God.

Earlier we read the story about the Prodigal Son. The one who thought life would be much better away from the Father and with the Father's money. He spent every last dime, and didn't have a thing. He thought he knew where he was going when he left, but he was lost without ever knowing it. But it dawned on him when he was feeding the pigs and wishing to eat what they had. He knew, Man I am lost, especially compared to what I had.

This too can happen to us. We can be lost without even knowing it. We might be even telling other people, follow me I know the way. Part of the reason I think we can be lost without even knowing it is the truth from this passage. The prophet Jeremiah said, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.” (17:9) Aka we lie to ourselves much less others about where we are and where we’re going. Another problem is that we carry around a sinful nature, that serves as a horrible compass for life. We have no clue where true north is because of it.

But here’s the reality friends gathered and maybe there are some skeptics or unchurched people here today. Maybe you’re just kicking the tires of the church - you are welcome to be here btw!! The truth is there is one who can direct us, there is one who can show us where to go and not to go. And it’s not my brother in law. But God and he does that through his Word. The greatest artist with the greatest guidance found in this book. And today we see how he directed someone to the right path, someone who was lost and didn’t even know it. We have Jesus meeting a man named Saul and turning his life around. We read. Can you turn to your neighbor and say, “He is the way.”

We live in a world of races and competitions. Chicago Marathon is next week. I know people who have run 5Ks, tough mudders, warrior dashes, triatholons and the like. How many have ever run a race? Well have you heard of the Barkley Marathons. It’s an ultramarathon set in Frozen Head State Park in Tennessee. Only 40 entrants are allowed, you have to write a letter of why I should be allowed to run. And pay the registration fee of \$1.60. The kicker it is a fun run 100 miles long with a 60 hour time limit. There was one brave soul from Canada willing to sign up and train for this ultramarathon. The man’s name was Gary Robbins. He documented his training sessions in the worst conditions in Canada, as he prepared to push himself. He ran the race for the 2nd time this past year, and he finished all 100 miles. As he came into touch the yellow gate representing the finish line. The race director had unfortunate news to tell him. He missed the 60 hour cut off window by... do you want to guess. 6 seconds. 6 seconds from completing this grueling, unbelievable race. 6 seconds after all that training. His documentary is called, “Where Dreams Go to Die.” And maybe that title indicates the likelihood of him signing up again for the Barkley Marathon. For some dreams let’s be honest can and should die.

Have you ever had a dream die? And when did you know it had. For me it was looking at the Freshman Basketball Team list. I had practiced almost every day that previous summer. I dreamed of being as good as my brother who was recruited and held many school records. But as I stared at the list and didn’t see my name. That dream died. For you perhaps it was a certain team, a girl or a guy. Maybe it was that first career. We dreamed about what it would be to be there and do that. But reality set in and it wasn’t going to happen.

This guy named Saul had a dream didn’t he. We see it in his description in these first two verses. Look here again, “Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.” His dream was to round up all the followers of the way, or followers of Jesus. Throw them into prison, kill them if he had to. Basically get rid of all this Jesus noise, and he was bold enough to go after them and pursue that dream. You see he was a highly religious man as a Pharisee, and the followers of the way were a problem. So He’s on his way, determining the marching orders of that dream, and the direction.

Until God intervenes. v.3 3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.” Paul literally and figuratively saw the light. And what God is basically doing is saying this dream, this mission of yours, the course that you have set out for yourself, it is the wrong one. You are going in the opposite direction of what is good, and what is right. You are on a broken road, and I am about to show you the right one. And here is our first take away. *It’s the grace of God when he lets one dream die, so a better dream can be born.*

I think of Gary Robbins, his dream may have died over the Barkley Marathons, but what is born is that he doesn’t have to spend so much time training. I think of my Basketball career, it stunk not to make it to that point, but I tell you what it freed up my free time. I didn’t have to do dribbling or shooting drills ever, again. Woo hoo. And today I just wonder *are there any dreams you’re pursuing that just need to die?* (Well pastor that sure is encouraging, so glad I came to church today. Trying to kill my dreams) Well, no, no not necessarily. As much as give birth, freedom and life to better ones. Because we’ve all been chasing down certain dreams that don’t lead to anything good, and sometimes we’ve even chasing down things like Paul that are just sinful. Pursuing something apart from pursuing God himself, an endeavor where you have not consulted with God on. Pursuing something that could drive us further from God rather than closer to him. And we just need to pause to evaluate. And perhaps pause to repent over all the times we’ve gone the opposite direction than what God desires. When we were on our road to Damascus, our broken road. Maybe you’re just visiting and this is all pretty new and the dreams you hold, and the path you’re on has nothing to do with God. Perhaps you were lost and didn’t even know it, but it’s being hinted at today. I believe God is here for you, and I believe a new and a better dream can be born.

I was reading Ecclesiastes this past week. And talk about a man who pursued dreams. Solomon who created an ancient wonder of the world, who did many great projects, and was known for his wisdom and yet his resounding theme is this. ““Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”³ What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun? 14 I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.” And maybe you’ve been there, and you’ve felt that. And you came to the end of your rainbow, the dream that promised your life change, but you left disillusioned because you didn’t find your pot of gold. The key there is the phrase under the sun, which equals apart from God. Apart from God dreams and accomplishments are a chasing after the wind. But with God, consulting with him, asking his grace, seeking his glory. Then dreams have value.

But how do we get there? We have to talk about this. I wanted to know where are my glasses wearers or contacts or anyone who had lasik. And do you remember the first time you could see again? I remember going to Doctor Schultz Beaver Dam, WI and my first pair of glasses. And we were driving home on a sunny day and what really stuck out for me were the trees. I’m like oh my goodness, look at the detail of each leaf, I can see each leaf. Wow this is a beautiful world we live in. This is what Paul had. Jesus actually made it so he couldn’t see. He had to be led by the hand, for three days. Until the scales fell from his eyes and you think of how good that moment must have been. Wondering if he would ever see again.

And for us spiritually isn’t it good when something like scales fall from our eyes and we start to see. Isn’t it good for us to gather and say Jesus do what you did for Paul. Open my eyes. Let me see. Lord Open my eyes to see that Jesus is more than teacher, philosopher, great man, or

marvel. Open my eyes to see him as Savior. Lord open my eyes to see and to proclaim that he is the Way the Truth and the Life. Open my eyes to see that His cross was not just a historical event, but a personal and a present one. Because it was on that cross he paid for my sins presently, there he died my death. Open my eyes to see that though I was lost, you have found me. And as surely as you called Saul that day, and turned him around. So you are calling me, calling all of us to believe in the name Paul would proclaim. To live now with nobler, higher purposes as we live for you. And there are some who maybe for the first time are seeing this light. Seeing Jesus as Beautiful Savior. And there are those of us who knew that, but need God to continue to do this work in our lives. To help us see the world, see people the way he sees. To help us dream as he dreams. *We are too see how every path leads straight to God.*

And as we've considered this. It's time to turn to our song. Coming from Rascal Flatts, and as you listen this morning I want you to imagine the work of God to lead you to Him. To see the steps of your story, who was used to tell you about Jesus, all the moments you learned to live for Jesus. How God was orchestrating things so you could have your eyes opened to the beautiful reality of love in Him. We listen. Yes, God blessed the broken road that led us straight to Jesus. To find in him our all in all. And with our final moments we want to talk about why the broken road is indeed blessed. And for me I find at least 3 reasons.

To describe the first I wanted to know have you ever had a meal, a product, or an experience where you just knew it's really going to be hard to ever go back from this - it's just so good. We had the Dish Network guys come out, and an example of this is DVR. When the ability to record shows you wanted to watch when you're not there came out - it was a game changer. For who remembers what it was like before DVR, does anyone still have VHS tapes from recording TV or certain games. Just me? Or think of TV, now that we have HD and 4K it's crazy ever going back to Standard Definition. The game has changed, it's too far better that I never want to go back. Give me my 4K, give me my on demand, don't make me go back.

One of the reasons the broken road is blessed is this: *the experience on the broken road shows the greater beauty of the right road.* It's only when I remember how lost I was, that I consider how good it is to be found. It's only when I remember being hung up by those sins, that I consider the beauty of being set free from them and their weight and their consequences. It's when I consider my life without God and those moments with God, that I am so thankful He has opened my eyes. The lyrics of the song say that, "Others who broke my heart, they were like northern stars, Pointing me on my way into your loving arms." Saul who changed to Paul would later write this about the experience of those in Christ, "20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned 21 when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." (Eph 4:20-24) And it's a life that when we are walking in step with the Spirit is a good life. It's about dreams that include God. And when you're dreams and your activity has God in mind nothing is wasted. It's about appreciating the beauty of the direction God showed you as he opened your eyes.

But there is something also else I see. Consider Paul's background before he saw the light. He was a Pharisee, which meant that he would have to be very knowledgeable in the Old

Testament. And this should not go unnoticed, because it is Paul's knowledge of the Old Testament that would lead him to be able to convince other Jews that Jesus was the fulfillment of those promises as he taught about the Messiah. Or look at his attitude and boldness. Yes he was breathing murderous threats and taking charge to round up the Christians and through them into jail. But it is that same passion, that same boldness that God would leverage for the sake of spreading the Gospel. For when commissioned by Jesus he wasn't afraid of death, wasn't afraid to speak boldly in public arenas, wasn't afraid to go to Jerusalem even though he had been warned about his arrest there, wasn't afraid to appeal to Caesar and go to Rome even though if he had not he would have been set free. You see *it is the lessons and skills learned on the broken road that help us when on the right road.*

I consider this as I look at parts of my journey. I remember working a job where I had to call people up and tell them pay their bills. I wasn't where I wanted to be. But God used that so when I got into ministry I would understand the boldness needed to say the thing people don't want to hear, but need to. I remember working as a waiter all through college. Felt on a winding road then to, but it was lessons learned in serving people that has made me more skilled with people and having somewhat of an ability to read body language and the mood around a person. Or the butter factory, that was a broken road, but when I was doing a shift from 6pm to 6am, tossing butter around from the hours of 2-5am. It's then I learned the gumption it would take to do what is necessary even though your tired, even though it doesn't feel right, because it needs to be done.

As God has called us to himself today. As he appeared to us through the Gospel and is constantly opening our eyes to the roads before us, and the things of God. Don't overlook your past. God can use the same abilities you gained there, to serve now in a different arena. Maybe as a passionate person for music, you leverage that for praise. Maybe as a peacemaker in your family, you do that for his sake. Maybe as a numbers person at work, you do the same to steward well what God gave you. Maybe as a bold person like Paul for the wrong things, you tap that same boldness for the right things. He uses the collection of our experiences to now leverage them for him.

It's easy to be lost without knowing it, but may God have opened your eyes to see life with him, and better direction. May he convince you through faith that a life and dreams dedicated with him in mind will not be a chasing after the wind. May he show you the beauty of the broken road to help you appreciate the road he has now set you on, and the assignments he has now given you. Let me pray for you: