

“Lost In The Lights?”

Luke 15:11-32

Series: At the Movies Week 4: The Greatest Showman

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A dazzling show, from rags to riches, fame and fortune- the Greatest showman- the final movie of our series highlights the rise, fall and humble recovery of a P.T. Barnum. From the very moment you press play- we open up to a man that refuses to be limited to his station. He has big dreams he is chasing. Quickly Barnum rises from nothing- being alone, fighting for his next meal- chasing a girl from a higher class- desperate for her father's approval. He builds a show of wondrous things and people. This dazzling show takes off - and P.T quickly climbs the ladder of fame and fortune. He rises- and with each wrung he climbs.... he becomes more hungry- chasing the applause... to* poof * with the shot of an old fashioned camera it's gone... no matter how high or how fast Barnum could climb- he couldn't outrun the inevitable- dissatisfaction - dissatisfaction lurked around every corner. It was never enough....

We all chase something. The question is are we chasing dreams that leave us empty or a God who satisfies us fully?

Lost in the lights?

Barnum gets caught up in the fame, applause and the spotlight- but the more he gains, the emptier he feels. Right before PT has a very big fall -his associate Philip Carlisle pulls him aside- he states his attention has been divided for too long- he issues a warning to come back- the risk wasn't worth the reward- the people he was casting aside just to chase more were the real reason he was successful. Instead Barnum puts it all on the line ready to risk it all just to gain a little bit more.

Scripture: “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36)

Success for Barnum happened quickly- he quickly rose from his station- the house, the extravagant life at his finger tips- still feeling lost and disconnected because he wasn't born into the wealth he chased so ardently. 10 compliments would be overridden by one person- one critic- not willing to accept how far he had come- he didn't see how much joy he was bringing with the

right intentions and instead chased more- rather than celebrate how far the show had come and the fast friends he made along the way.

Application: The lights of success, popularity, or possessions never last. Only the Light of Christ (John 8:12) never fades.

“When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.””

John 8:12 NIV

2. What Are You Pursuing?

From the very opening number Barnum falls head over heels for a girl above his pay grade. He spends his young adult life trying to be “enough” just to get to her. When she really liked him for who he was the whole time. He spends time making promises with good intentions yet somehow wrong execution. Barnum promises his beloved that He will give her the world. To charity- the world was a loving family- a devoted husband- a partnership of chasing dreams together- but to Barnum the perfect life meant money, fame, mansions and mass approval when he had all he needed all along.... He gets the girl of his dreams and sings promising her a wonderful life... As they dance and twirl they face an open window. Looking into the high life- holding her hand he didn't look into her eyes but.... out- on what he felt-they could still be missing... not being present in the blessing he was living right in that moment. He pined for her- he got her..: it wasn't enough. Even when Barnum had the love of his wife, he still looked through the window of a restaurant longing for “more.”

Scripture: “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” (Psalm 16:11)

What we pursue reveals what we treasure. Dreams aren't bad, but only God brings lasting joy.

3. Running or Resting?

The opening number A Million Dreams shows Barnum running, striving, never stopping. His wife, however, was content with the simple life they already had. We end this song with Barnum's daughter singing about her dreams. An innocent dream of owning ballet slippers crushed PTs heart. He couldn't provide his daughter with ballet slippers. This song that has now passed on to her broke the straw on the camels back. He refused to sit in the glory of a special moment. In this scene we see his open struggle with dissatisfaction and how that impacted the people he loved most. Barnum gives the gift of dreaming in the lights to his daughter. He asks them both girls to tell him their dreams. His wife - looking on with caution, states her dream is

to continue being as happy as they are right now. But Barnum still feels the need to chase the more that is out there. In our dreams we can....

Scripture: “Be still, and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10).

We run after bigger, better, greener—but peace is found in stillness with God (Philippians 4:11–13)

“I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.”

Philippians 4:11-13 NIV

A million dreams don't need to be keeping us awake....

4. Run to the Father

The bigger they are, the harder they fall.... Barnum leaves his show to tour with Jeanie Lind. An act that would not have been found at Barnum's circus but traveling with her was an attempt to rise even higher than before. When he meets this singer, he begins to throw it all away- chasing applause and acceptance that he had never reached or received from the higher class- leaving behind what had made him successful in the first place. He was issued warnings to stay- the risk of these shows with no profit was too large of a risk. He went and embarked on that journey anyway. Quickly he realized while being at the very top- all that he had jeopardized and left behind. He scrambled to return home- back into the arms of his family. As he was making the decision to return home, he lost everything- coming home to a massive fire set in the circus he fought so hard to build- One he left behind to pursue greater. His split attention came back to bite him. When Barnum lost everything—his money, reputation, and trust—he returned home. That's **where restoration began.**

Scripture: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us...” (1 John 1:9).

This chase reminds me of a very familiar story in the greatest book of all time.... The parable of the prodigal son.... Like the Prodigal Son (Luke 15), God welcomes us home. His forgiveness meets us in our failure.

A story found in Luke mirrors that of Barnum's and while I would love to read it to you- I'm going to encourage you to read this week and reflect on this story in your own quiet time. This story ...the prodigal son found in Luke 15:11-32 introduces us to a man with two sons. In Luke 15:12 the younger son states “father give me my share of the estate” (slide) in Layman's terms He is essentially saying “I wish you were dead so I could get the inheritance you are going to

leave me” Yikes. When the son gets this inheritance it says in verse 13 He squandered it....
Quick turn around

The Chase: Like Barnum, the younger son believed happiness was “out there”—in wealth, experiences, and adventure. He left home chasing his “million dreams.”

The Emptiness: He quickly discovered that what looked satisfying- left him empty, hungry, and alone—just like Barnum, who achieved fame but still longed for more.

V. 14 ““After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.” (Slide)

Don’t wait to connect with your Father in Heaven until you are “need”. Let this be your wake up call! (Slide)

The Turning Point: When the son hit rock bottom, he realized the life he longed for had been with the Father all along. Barnum, too, only found peace when he returned to what mattered most—his family.

The Father’s Welcome: The father ran to embrace his son with forgiveness and restoration—just as God runs to us when we stop chasing empty lights and run back to Him.

V.20 “So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”

Luke 15:20 NIV

The father meets the son where he is in his heart change- he didn’t wait til he got all the way there- as soon as He saw him- as soon as God sees in you a desire to run down that road- He will meet you there. A desire to return is the beginning of the path of removing the “lights” from your eyes.

5. The Endless Chase vs. Present Satisfaction

Barnum only found peace when he stopped chasing bigger dreams and embraced what he already had—his family. When he stopped running and returned home he was met right away with open arms. Ready to rebuild and be content.

Scripture: “But godliness with contentment is great gain.” (1 Timothy 6:6)

Chasing the world leaves us restless. Chasing God satisfies us now. What Barnum discovered at the end, we are invited to discover today: only Christ satisfies. His final song displays his heart change..... from now on- he won’t be blinded by the light.

We followed a man in his discovery of what it really means to have “everything”. He had it all even before the riches. And once he achieved what his heart desired- he found all that he was chasing was never enough to satisfy. Many of us are living the same script.

Are you lost in the lights or walking in the Light of Christ? Are you chasing dreams that fade, or running to the Father who satisfies?

Lay down the endless chase. Find rest, joy, and satisfaction in Jesus.

Like Karen Armbrister..... a full time missionary with Karazim ministries in the Bahamas. Both her and her husband were radio and television personalities on the island. One day her husband was called out into full time ministry- Karen accepted this knowing that she could provide the funds and keep a job she always loved. Day by day her heart began to make little pulls toward leaving too. She pushed them down- refusing to believe walking away is what she should really do. Until one day she received a phone call from a friend. Very matter of factly her friend said “ I have been praying for you and I have a word to share with you” Karen of course wanting to hear what the Lord might have to say to her -agreed to hear her friend out. She said “ you have been disobedient, you have felt stirring to move and you have not. God wants me to tell you that if you keep up this disobedience He will shake you out so you can be placed where He desires you to be. Karen immediately realizes this about pursuing full time ministry. Out of her reverence for God she wrote a resignation letter that very same week and handed it in. She felt instant relief and peace when the letter left her hands- and has been in full time ministry ever since. Karazim ministries helped thousands of bohemian people- through answered prayers- support of churches from across the world- including Woodside! Karen walked away from the bright lights and stepped into the fullness we can find in God- now she helps people every day and witnesses Gods big and powerful miracles- no shaking required.

So a lot like Barnum final song... from now on...we can come back home.... Come back home.... Home again... we won't be blinded by the lights!

Pray

Heavenly Father, we humbly come before you. Sometimes we get lost in the lights of the world- we chase what isn't for us- we dive into empty promises and dreams that lead us nowhere. Lord you invite us into so much more. You welcome us with open arms- I pray that you tune our hearts to yours- only your love satisfies. I pray for those seeking you right now- that you meet them, you hold them and you restore them. Chasing what is not from you leaves us empty, broken and unsatisfied. Let us find full satisfaction in you. We pray this in your powerful and great name Lord. Amen

