

GLOW: Philippians 1:12-30, An Unbreakable Glow, 5/24/20

In 2015 Disney released the movie **Inside Out** that explored the emotions of young Riley who was uprooted from her Midwest Life and moved to San Francisco. Her emotions live in headquarters, inside Riley's mind where they help advise her about what perspective to take on her circumstances she experiences throughout her life. Fear, Anger, Disgust and Sadness and Joy. I wonder, which of these five characters might you find dominating the headquarters of your mind during this quarantine? Now we all want Joy, but sometimes it seems elusive. **This is what GLOW** is all about, a study through Philippians. In the darkness of our circumstances, the gospel was made to glow brightest. And Paul is going to be exhibit A this morning. Now remember Paul's circumstances? Paul was quarantined on House-Arrest in Rome, shackled by an 18-inch chain to a Praetorian Guard all hours of the day. He couldn't go to the bathroom without being with someone. Humiliating, Powerless position. He's awaiting trial to find out his fate, which very well could be death. Paul had every right be dominated by Anger, Sadness, Fear, maybe even disgust. But he chose Joy. He says, "Don't worry, It doesn't matter, it doesn't really affect my life." Now, either he's lost his mind...serenity now, insanity later. Or 2, he's lying. He's putting on a good Christian face. Christians are supposed to act this way, rejoice, smile. Or he's on to something real here. In this passage Paul is going to teach us three life lessons that enable him to glow through every circumstance.

The first life lesson is implied based on Paul circumstances:

Life Lesson #1 Life Appears to be Tragically Ironic

Alanis Morissette: Ironic

An old man turned ninety-eight

He won the lottery and died the next day

It's a black fly in your Chardonnay

It's a death row pardon two minutes too late

And isn't it ironic, don't you think?

Just like poor Alanis, **[Tragic Irony Slide]** here's why Paul's circumstances appeared so tragically ironic to the Philippians. If Christianity was a sports team, Paul was God's best scorer and it appears that God takes him out of the game, and according to v. 15-17 there are people ready to kick him while he's down. Just when Paul is really getting going he's taken out for 2 years. "Why is God allowing this to happen to our best player?" Whether you are a Christian or not, we all ask difficult questions about the tragic irony of life, don't we? But Christians have even a harder time with these questions. We see people who have made sacrifices for the Gospel, are incredibly effective in ministry and furthering God's mission, just full of light and sometimes we see bad things happen to people like that. They get sick, they suffer, they die untimely deaths. This came home personally this week as **Dr. Ravi Zacharias** passed on Monday, one of the most influential Christian writers and speakers in our lifetime, who had a unique ministry among international dignitaries, in Ivy League schools, other world religious leaders, and he had a transformational impact on my life personally. These are all the "**Why God?**" questions. It makes you wonder, why God seems to shoot an arrow through his own mission sometimes.

Why would you take him out of the game? Why quarantine churches for months so we can't meet? How is that helping the God's message? God what are you up to? Paul has an answer:

Philippians 1:12-14

¹² Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.

¹⁴ And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

Life Lesson #2 When Your Life is In God's Hands He will Always Have Plans

Paul had planned to go to Rome to preach, hoping it would be in the amphitheaters and open-air marketplaces. Big evangelistic campaign. Boom- quarantine, all his plans out the window. Looks like tragic irony. Satan and the forces of evil are winning. God, what are you doing? When Satan plays checkers, God is playing chess. Paul would never have planned a mission to the praetorian guard, but that is exactly God had planned. Paul now had a captive audience to hear the gospel. 2-3x a day some hardened, mean, pagan praetorian guard is chained to the most persuasive evangelist in the history of the world. I mean who's really the captive here. One by one they are coming to faith, these influential men took the gospel into the very home of the Emperor, where Paul could never have gone. **Philippians 4:22 All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.** The household of the most powerful, and exclusive man on the planet was hearing the gospel. That's like if several of China's Head of State Xi Jinping's family, advisors and secret service came to Christ because a Christian prisoner of the state shared the gospel with the guards.

Matthew Henry: "Paul is claiming that God is the only alchemist." Alchemist tried to figure out a way to turn lead into gold. Something not valuable, into something incredibly valuable. Couldn't do it. But that's what God does all the time. Joseph same situation. God turned lead to gold. Paul believes that his life is held in the hands of the sovereign God. It is this conviction in the overruling authority of God that gives him the ability to see his circumstances as God's advanced strategy. **Corrie ten Boom- "We don't know what the future will hold, we know who holds the future."**

Now, be careful- I don't think Paul believes that these few converts and some embolden believers are the only reasons for his quarantine. If that's all, I don't think it would be worth it. He trust that although he only sees a couple good moves of the knights and bishops on the board God sees checkmate! Paul had no way of knowing what we know now- **The longest period of Paul's incarceration was the greatest period of Paul's impact.** Staggering. We have four letters preserved in our Bibles from this period, the churches grew in strength, influential people came to know the Lord...and God was not just doing something in the world, but he was doing something in Paul that he needed.

[Life Session #2 Slide] Are you surrendered to God's plans? Is it possible that when you said, Lord I surrender to your plan, that you were like the couple who went to the architect and asked the architect to design a house for them. But the architect discovered the couple already designed it for themselves and just wanted the architect to sanction it. God here are my well-laid plans, I will surrender as long as you blessed them.

The next time you are tempted to think...these are my plans. I'm stuck with this job, I'm stuck with this boss. I'm stuck in this house, I'm stuck with these kids, I'm stuck with this spouse, I'm stuck in this town. What if you had Paul's perspective of God as the ultimate alchemist, turning lead to gold, the ultimate chess player, moving the pieces in a strategic way for his ultimate good and glory in you and through you? Maybe you have access to reach people that the majority of preachers and evangelists can't reach. In your office, on your shift, in the store, on your computer, in the military. When I was a pastor in the DC Metro area, I had a friend who hated his job at the Pentagon but he was really good at it and kept getting promoted. He just felt stuck in a military career. And he invited me to lunch at the Pentagon one time. So I had to first get a background check, an appointment was set, I needed to get two forms of ID, go through several checkpoints...It was crazy. And he met me there and he's introducing me to several high-ranking people, officers, Generals, people who inform the President and make massive, historical decisions. And I said to him, how many Christians do you know here? He said, "Not many." I said, "Do you understand that these are people God has placed in your sphere of influence that I could never reach? Instead of seeing yourself as stuck, what if God wants you to see this as strategic?" He began to have a perspective change and it changed his whole way he saw his workplace, he began to look forward to saying, OK God what do you have in store for me today? And he would come with stories, in fact I had the privilege of baptizing a guy who came to Christ through him. God's got plans if you are willing to see.

Maybe you feel stuck with an illness. My father-in-law was diagnosed a few months ago with stage 4 Colon cancer. A shock to all of us. Talk about tragic irony, he retired and just weeks later gets this diagnosis...sounds like a line from the Alanis Morissette song. Many of you have been praying and they are so grateful and have felt your prayers these months of chemo treatments. Now, we just heard last week incredible news that his scans so far are virtually clean, Doctors are shocked and God is getting all the glory. I text him last week and said- *"I'm really proud of you and Sue. I'm serious when I say that I wanna be more like you when I grow up. The way you have both handled this is nothing less than a miracle and God's grace has been really evident in your lives. I know the story isn't fully written yet, but so far it's a great book to read."* He wrote back and said, *"This may sound strange but I thank God for my cancer. It has really changed my walk with the Lord. My prayer life has increased 10-fold and my desire for the Word has increased. Before I was quite content to coast through the Christian life. This trial has been a blessing. We'll see what his plans are for me."* Sometimes you get to see it, sometimes you only see the edges of what God is doing, but if you put your life in his hands, he will always have plans.

Philippians 1:20-21

²⁰ I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Life Lesson #3 Life with Jesus is Worth Everything.

For Paul, Jesus Defines his life. Give me Jesus, if I have nothing+Jesus=Everything. Now there are lots of competing sources that we can be lured into letting define our lives.

Epicurean- for me to live is happiness. Work? Money and fun! Freedom, Recreation, pleasure. Take away the pleasure, no life.

Stoic- for me to live is to be self-control. You take my dignity and control away there is nothing left for me.

Morality- for me to live is to be a good person.

Workaholic- For me to live is productivity. I feel alive as long as I'm accomplishing goals, whether on the sports field, education, career. making things happen, putting in hard work...the hours...what if you no longer are able to work? lose your job, what would be left of me?

People-Pleaser- For me to live is being liked, being needed. Most of us have chosen that competes- Our friends, our family, our kids, our spouse. We must have that.

Troubles come and take away the things that make our life worth living. If your whole life is collapsing because your career is collapsing, it's because your career is your life. Some of us are being dominated by Fear, Anger, Sadness and Disgust... because something right now in this quarantine has been taken from you that is where you find life. Meanwhile Jesus is waving, "hey over here- I've come to give you life. Sound familiar?" This is the whole point of the Gospel of John.

John 1:4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

John 5:39-40 You search the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

John 6:48 I am the bread of life.

John 10:10 I have come that they may have abundant life

John 14:6 I am the way, the truth and the life.

John 20:31 But these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Jesus did not come to make you happier, Jesus did not come to make you healthier, Jesus did not come to make you richer or more comfortable. Jesus didn't come to make bad men good or good men better... he came to make dead men and women alive.

What glows at the center of your life? Jesus or something else? For Paul- his glow of gospel joy is unshakeable because Jesus is at the center. What can an enemy do to someone with an unshakeable faith? For Paul- You can't throw them in prison, I'll share Christ with the guards and write the most influential letters that millions of people will read and trust Christ through. You can release me and I will continue to have a fruitful ministry. You can't threaten them with death- to live is Christ and die is gain...I still win! It is said, "No one is ready to live until they are ready to die."

From one believer on fire for God, not afraid of people, not afraid of death can embolden thousands with new courage to bear witness for Christ. It happened with Martin Luther in the 16th century Germany and with John Knox in 16th century Scotland. It happened with George Whitfield in the American colonies and John Wesley in England in the 1700s. It occurred with Charles Spurgeon in Victorian London and with Amy Carmichael in India, Dwight Moody, Billy Graham, Priscilla Shirer, Ravi Zacharias and these are the big names, but there are thousands and thousands who glow and inspire the sphere of influence around them because Christ is at the center. "One woman or man lit up for God has the capacity to put steel in the backbone of countless believers who live work and witness around them." For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. May God work that from a nice Christian catchphrase, into living, breathing mantra in your life. Now how does that happen? It starts with taking in the gospel.

In the gospel, Jesus says "for me, to live is you and to die is gain."

We are his greatest treasure and joy. He didn't want heaven without us. When we really embrace this it can't help but change us. For him to live is me, then for me to live is him...We love him because he first loved us.

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Giving

For me to live is Christ, to die is gain- what an unbreakable glow. Let's close by singing of the source of our joy- the blessed assurance of life with Jesus.

