



December 29-30, 2018
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Reel Christmas: The Abundance of Jesus

John 10:10

That of course was Jimmy Steward in "It's A Wonderful Life" after he experienced an "awakening" of sorts about the incredible gift that LIFE is and how wrong-headed he was to wish that he had never been born!

If you are new with us this morning we are finishing up our Reel Christmas Sermon Series where we've been looking at Christmas films through the eyes of the apostle John. Today our Scripture is John 10:10.

Jesus said,

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." (Pray)

Many of us are familiar with Jesus' words in John 10:10 – "I have come to give you life and life more abundant!" What we may not be as familiar with is the larger context of that verse. To understand John 10:10 we have to go all the way back to the beginning of John 9. Remember that when the Bible was written the writers did not include chapters and verses. Those were inserted later to make it easier for readers.

At the beginning of chapter 9 Jesus came across a blind man and his disciples asked Jesus the question, "Who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?" The disciples were asking a question based on the prevailing rabbinical teaching of the day that there was "no suffering without iniquity." In other words the blind man must have done something wrong to deserve his blindness. The rabbis taught that even a child could sin in the womb or that its soul might have sinned in a preexistent state if a child was born with a defect like blindness. They also taught that punishments came on people because of the sin of their parents.

What a horrible worldview to be trapped in! It sounds a lot like karma in Hinduism! That the blessings or curses of this present life are due to something you've done in a previous life. If you've ever been to India you can see how destructive this kind of teaching is to a culture.

The truth is suffering is a part of life in this world. We live in a fallen world and events happen all the time that are not necessarily our fault but we are affected by them.

Jesus corrected the false teaching of the Pharisees when he said, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."

God's purpose is to give us abundant life! Abundant life through the One who is LIFE itself: JESUS!! Jesus is abundant life! Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) Jesus is LIFE because He is the way to the Father in heaven. As Jesus said to Philip the disciple, "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father!" (John 14:9) And the Father wants to bring salvation, healing and redemption into this broken, sin-ravaged world so that people might experience new life and bring glory to God!

The Pharisees kept people shackled with false teaching that cast heavy burdens on them. They were the ones Jesus referred to as “thieves” whose purpose was to kill, steal and destroy.” Jesus, on the other hand, came to “bring life” – to heal, liberate and redeem that which was lost.

In the movie *“It’s A Wonderful Life?”* George Bailey learns the important lesson of GRATITUDE.

Our outline this morning is a simple one:

GRATITUDE FOR YOUR PAST.
GRATITUDE FOR YOUR PRESENT.
GRATITUDE FOR YOUR FUTURE.

Gratitude is an important spiritual practice that brings health to your soul.

GRATITUDE FOR YOUR PAST.

At the end of *“It’s A Wonderful Life”* George Bailey wished he’d never been born! He was not grateful for his past. Throughout his life he struggled wanting to get out of Bedford Falls but he never received the chance. He couldn’t join the army during WWII because he couldn’t hear out of one ear, caused by an incident in his youth when he jumped into a freezing ice pond to save his younger brother Harry. On another occasion George gave all the money he saved up for college so his brother Harry could go. Circumstances never worked out for George to leave Bedford Falls.

Yet because George never left home, he ended up taking over the Building and Loan Company started by his father Peter Bailey who met an untimely death. This gave the citizens of Bedford Falls the opportunity of home ownership, something they would not have received had George Bailey not been in charge of the local bank. Let’s watch. (movie clip)

Are you grateful for your past?

That’s a question some people have a hard time saying “YES” to. If you have a difficult time answering “yes” to that question, have you considered how God wants to redeem your past so that you can bring him greater glory in the present?

I’m sure for the “man born blind” in John 9 his answer to the question “Are you grateful for your past” would have been NO. Life must have been extremely hard. He must have experienced great loneliness and isolation being excluded from temple worship if the rabbis taught that God was punishing him for something he had done wrong. Even after his sight returned the man was kicked out of the temple by the Pharisees for being healed on the Sabbath! He couldn’t seem to catch a break!!

Then he ran into Jesus. Jesus asked him, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” The man asked, “Tell me who he is so that I may believe in him” Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.” Then the man said, “Lord, I believe, and he worshiped him.” John 9:35-38

In an instant Jesus transformed an agonizing purposeless existence into one that had meaning and beauty!

God wants to take the difficult circumstances from our past and use them for his glory. In Celebrate Recovery we say that “God Never Wastes A Hurt.” He wants to heal and redeem broken parts of your story for his glory.

In *"It's A Wonderful Life"* the director Frank Capra is constantly reflecting back to earlier scenes in the life of George Bailey to help the viewing audience understand why George was the way he was. Whether the director intended it or not he was helping generations of people learn how God works even difficult things out for good if people will turn their lives over to him.

In Celebrate Recovery people go through a similar process of reflecting back on some of the harder experiences of life so that God can bring about transformation through the process of forgiveness and making amends.

God wants us to have gratitude for our past because he wants us to see and experience, first hand, how he can take something that was broken and ugly and turn it into something that is beautiful to be used for his purposes for his glory!

God not only wants us to experience GRATITUDE FOR OUR PAST BUT ALSO TO HAVE GRATITUDE FOR THE PRESENT – FOR THE HERE AND NOW.

GRATITUDE FOR YOUR PRESENT

Jesus want you to experience ABUNDANT LIFE TODAY, even if circumstances seem less than desirable.

A few weeks ago a number of us from our Life Group gathered around Paul Wimber's bedside as he was receiving Hospice Care during his final days at home. It was a very sweet time. One of our group members recited the book of Ephesians by heart! That was remarkable in and of itself! What made it even more remarkable is that same man had had two brain surgeries this past year and could still do this! I played some Christmas songs on the classical guitar and as a group we talked and prayed together thanking God for his goodness and mercy. The Holy Spirit's presence was palpable! Abundant Life even as God was preparing Paul for his journey home!!

I experienced deep gratitude at that moment. Gratitude for my friendship with the Wimbers and others in our Life Group; gratitude for our community at Chapel Hill, gratitude for the simple gifts of friendship, and fellowship in Christ!

It's important to practice the attitude of gratitude in the present!

I so appreciated the hospitality series that Pastor Mark and the other pastors preached before Advent.... The call to look around and meet someone new, to sit in a different seat, and to go out of your way to invite someone to church. It's having an effect! It's making a difference! This past Monday night on Christmas Eve over 4000 people attended services at Chapel Hill. That's the largest number since 2010 and a 21% increase over last year! Overall, worship attendance has been going up considerably since this past summer. God seems to be doing a "new work" in our midst!

Each week the preaching pastor for the past Sunday follows up first time visitors with a phone call. I took a turn this week to give the other pastors a well-deserved break. I talked to a woman on the phone who is new to the area and to the church and she was remarking how friendly and extroverted the church was. She said that that she had been to a number of churches in the area and she was beaming about how friendly and outgoing people are at Chapel Hill! Way to go Church!

I believe your enthusiasm and love expressed to the people around you flows out of a grateful heart! A heart grateful for what God is doing in the present!! Great job Church!

God not only wants us to have gratitude for the past and present, but He also wants us to have gratitude for the future!

GRATITUDE FOR YOUR FUTURE.

God has a wonderful plan for your future!

In It's A Wonderful Life – George and Mary each throw rocks through the window of the old hotel on 320 Sycamore St and make a wish. Mary of course wishes that she and George might buy that old house someday and fix it up which comes true! (movie clip)

We know, of course, that not all of our wishes and desires in this life come true, and it's a good thing they don't! Our prayers can be incredibly self-centered and our vision can be very myopic!

But we hold fast to biblical promises that give us hope for the future like Jeremiah 29:11-13

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ”

We have gratitude for our future because we know that the God who loves us today, has meaningful, good things in store for us tomorrow – both now and the life to come.

So as the final hours of 2018 tick down where is the “gratitude meter” in your life? Are you experiencing gratitude for your past, present and future?

Some of you may have things in your past that are blocking your ability to experience the fullness of the “abundant life” Jesus promises! Maybe there are some broken relationships that need to be healed. Celebrate Recovey provides a process to help people walk through the brokenness of your past so that healing and “abundant life” can be experienced. You might want to consider embarking on that quest in 2019!

Maybe your present and future appear a bit foreboding. Maybe you have some health issues that are a great challenge. Maybe you're looking for a new job or are applying to schools for next year but you don't know where you're going to go!

Remember: you are not alone. Jesus is with you. “He will never leave you or forsake you.” Are you letting others into your life to help you walk through a difficult season? Or are you trying to face some painful things alone? Don't go through difficult things in your life alone. Join a Life Group. Seek out others who can walk with you.

And for those of you who have walked through difficult things and come out on the other side you might be asking the Lord how you can share your experience with others to help them get through a particular trial.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Wherever you are this morning in your walk with God He wants you to be grateful for the gift of abundant life that He provides through Jesus!