

Streaming All the Way – Week 2
“It’s a Wonderful Life”

Good morning and welcome to church!

We are so thankful you are present this morning. Your presence matters!

If we haven’t had the chance to connect, let’s do it, today right after this service.

We are in week two of our series called Streaming all the way. This is a fun series where we are combining faith and film.

Sometimes the best stories we appreciate on a screen reflect the greatest story the world has ever seen.

Last week we talked about doubt and strengthening our belief in God.

This week we are looking at the classic movie, It’s a Wonderful Life.

Let’s jump right into our first clip. (**Show clip 1:15-2:54**)

When two celestial beings call Clarence over for a mission to save George Bailey’s life, it lights up another truth for all of us to think about...

What is a wonderful life?

How would we define a ‘Wonderful Life’? Perhaps one filled with material gain, financial prosperity or a successful and ever thriving career?

Maybe a life packed with adventure, enriched by frequent and luxurious visits to far-off distant lands?

Maybe you are realizing that as another Christmas has come upon us, and the thought has come in, is there something more?

Is there more than we have yet to experience or discover? Is there some other ingredient to life that without which, we simply cannot call our own life ‘Wonderful’?

Fun Fact: The working title of ‘It’s a Wonderful Life’ was originally ‘The Greatest Gift’.

What ‘greatest gift’ at Christmas could possibly be enough to shatter our previous dulled experiences and reveal to us something new for the years to come?

The entire existence of Christmas, we remember a man, born in a Bethlehem stable, who promises us new life. Indeed, Jesus Christ offers the gift of a 'Wonderful' Life.

He told us in **John 10.10 | I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance.**

Having life in abundance sounds "wonderful."

There was a very important statement at the end of that clip. I wonder how many caught it.

Clarence asks God, is he sick? God replies, *no, worse, he's discouraged.*

Maybe that's you this season. There is uncertainty and unsettledness.

When we come into these types of season...This is where we turn to something or someone to try and find peace. We try to get outside of the discouragement, frustration, and unsettledness.

We don't enjoy staying in that zone, so we move to find a more comfortable one.

This is where God comes into play. Many across the world have turned to Him in this season of their life. God even sent His one and only Son to this world so that we can find peace.

There was a prophet named Isaiah that foretold everyone about this.

Isaiah 9.6 | "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace."

The Hebrew word for "peace," *shalom*, is often used in reference to an appearance of calm and tranquility of individuals, groups, and nations.

The Greek word Eirene means "unity and accord"; Paul uses Eirene to describe the objective of the New Testament church.

But the deeper, more foundational meaning of peace is "the spiritual harmony brought about by an individual's restoration with God."

In other words, **Gods promises are how we receive peace in the midst of our problems.**

You see, the story of the prince of peace never changes. What changes is our circumstances. Our struggles, our discouragement.

"Peace is not a feeling; peace is an objective sense of harmony with God." Sandra Maria Van Opstal

In another inspirational story, we read about another man with troubles of his own. Like George Bailey, this man finds himself trapped in an insignificant life.

His name was Mordecai. He is found in the book of Esther.

Let's jump into Esther and read a little bit here...

Esther 2.5-7 | ⁵ In the fortress of Susa, there was a Jewish man named Mordecai son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite. ⁶ Kish had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the other captives when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took King Jeconiah of Judah into exile. ⁷ Mordecai was the legal guardian of his cousin Hadassah (that is, Esther), because she had no father or mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was extremely good-looking. When her father and mother died, Mordecai had adopted her as his own daughter.

Mordecai was a Jew. He adopts his orphaned cousin, Hadassah (following the death of her father and mother) and raises her as his own daughter. (Hadassah was her Hebrew name...Her Gentile name was Esther.)

Esther 2.17 | ¹⁷ The king loved Esther more than all the other women. She won more favor and approval from him than did any of the other virgins. He placed the royal crown on her head and made her queen in place of Vashti.

Mordecai's sacrifice was well worth it, because this little girl would grow up to become the Queen of Persia.

Esther 2.19-23 | ¹⁹ When the virgins were gathered a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the King's Gate. ²⁰ Esther still did not reveal her family background or her ethnicity, as Mordecai had directed. She obeyed Mordecai's orders, as she always had while he raised her. ²¹ During those days while Mordecai was sitting at the King's Gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the entrance, became infuriated and planned to assassinate King Ahasuerus. ²² When Mordecai learned of the plot, he reported it to Queen Esther, and she told the king on Mordecai's behalf. ²³ When the report was investigated and verified, both men were hanged on the gallows.

After his adopted daughter becomes Queen, Mordecai uncovers an assassination plot at the very gates of the palace doors and saves the life of the King of Persia.

Life is rolling. Life is good!

Despite all of this, Mordecai finds himself in deep trouble. Following the demise of the would-be assassins, a man named Haman is promoted. Haman was an evil man, who had a hatred of Jews.

Esther 3.2 | 2 All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor.

Esther 3.5-6 | 5 When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. 6 Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead, Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes. -

Mordecai finds himself in a tough spot with an adversary who didn't want him to succeed.

Jump back over to the movie...All throughout George Baileys life, he finds himself in tough spots. He was a kind a loving man who would do anything for anybody, but was often met with struggles.

(no audio background clip from 0:04:49-0:05:05)

As a kid, he saves his younger brother, Harry, from drowning in an icy pond, leading to an infection in George's left ear that cost him his hearing. This sacrifice proves well worth it as Harry grows up and goes on to save dozens of lives and win a Medal of Honor.

(no audio background smash-up of clips from 0:08:12-0:08:22; 0:11:15-0:11:30)

In another heroic moment, George prevents his boss at the local pharmacy, Mr. Gower, from accidentally poisoning one of his customers: An act Mr. Gower thanks George for and never forgets.

(no audio background of clip from 0:52:00-0:52:08)

Finally, instead of taking a honeymoon around the world with his hometown sweetheart Mary, George chooses to stay, use his own money, and help save the people of Bedford Falls from financial ruin during the Great Depression.

He gave and gave, but discouragement and struggle still found him.

And, just as Mordecai has Haman, George has a rival called Old Man Potter.

But Potter has an offer for George: Everything he ever wanted...for a price.

(use clip from 1:07:51-1:12:39 - Mr. Potter's Offer)

George was faced with an opportunity to turn to the material things of the world to gain the peace he's been searching for.

A life of accumulating, owning, and having is still quite small when we consider the possibilities.

Which begs the question, **How much is one life worth anyway?**

Both Mordecai and George prove that those who serve and save others have lives of great value. Sadly, Haman and Old Man Potter believe quite the opposite; that the lives of others, like money, are only good for the taking.

Haman plots to take not only Mordecai's life, but the life of every single one of his people as well (in a word: genocide).

Haman was given the green light to kill all of the Jews.

After George says no to Mr. Potter, Mr. Potter doesn't quit and just leave him alone.

He ends up getting Baileys business. Following the gutting loss of the \$8,000 needed to keep his little loan company in business, George blows up at his wife and kids in a stress-filled fit of rage.

In shame, George leaves his house and family behind and finds himself contemplating taking his own life so his family would be spared his failure, and at least get some life insurance money for his death.

Not sure where to turn in the darkest moment leading up to his decision, George breaks down and does the only thing left to do...

(use clip from 1:35:47-1:36:26 - George's Prayer)

Fun Fact: some of this prayer was not scripted and completely spontaneous. Flowing from his own struggles, Stewart later said,

"As I said those words, I felt the loneliness, the hopelessness of people who had nowhere to turn, and my eyes filled with tears. I broke down sobbing. That was not planned at all."
(Ashton, 12/1/2020)

The film was redemptive and healing for Stewart, and of the 80 films he acted in, he considered this to be his personal favorite.

Here is a truth you can take heart in: **In your darkest moments, God hears. God is near. He feels what you are feeling. And, when we humbly cry out to Him, He is there to guide and to help.**

God cares about your life.

When we get discouraged, mad, sad, frustrated, etc...we stop using our life to make a difference.

Conclusion: As we wind down today, let me ask you this question... **what kind of difference can one life actually make?**

Like George, Mordecai is broken when he learns about Haman's plot to kill him and all his people. He tears his clothes and weeps bitterly, praying and begging God for help.

George learns this truth the hardest way imaginable after Clarence, his guardian angel, grants his wish to never have been born.

In his darkest moment, George is able to see his life as if he had never been born. He's able to see the difference his life truly made in the lives of those he loved.

In Mordecai's darkest moment, he challenges his niece Esther, the Queen of Persia, to risk everything and ask the King to spare her, her uncle, and her people. She does, saving the lives of thousands.

And whether you realize it or not, One life (your life) can make an incredible difference in this world.

Maybe you never saved your kid brother, your boss, or your town.
Maybe you never saved your niece, a king, or all your people.

But you matter. Someone needs you. You are loved. You are rich. You are blessed to be a blessing. You are staggeringly valuable to the kingdom of God.

God's purpose and destiny for your life can be felt for generations if you love and serve those around you. When you value and invest in the people around you, every small dash of kindness, demonstration of love, and deposit of encouragement, will make an incredible difference.

Following George's revelation of just how wonderful his life is, he finds himself back at home and overwhelmed by the love of his family. But George is still in deep trouble and in need of a miracle...

(use clip of movie from 2:04:36-2:09:45)

Your life is as rich as your relationships.

Like George learned, thanks to his wife, Mary, and all the people of Bedford Falls, God's purpose for your life flows through the relationships that you invest in. George never expected to get a return.

Like Mary was to George.
Like Esther was to Mordecai.
And, like Jesus was to us all.

The value of your life is measured not by the riches of money, but by the richness of relationships, starting with the greatest relationship any of us can have... one with our Maker.

If someone were to ask us if we had a 'Wonderful Life', what would our response be and why?