

The Big Reveal: The Suffering Servant
December 17, 2017
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Title: "It IS a Wonderful Life"
Text: Isaiah 53:3-7

"It's a Wonderful Life", by Frank Capra is a true Christmas classic movie from 1947 starring Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed. Stewart plays George Bailey, a man who has big dreams, including travelling and leaving behind the small town of Bedford Falls. However his marriage to his high school sweetheart, played by Reed, and the need to take over his father's building and loan business, keeps him there. Despite that he becomes a happy husband, father and businessman until one Christmas Eve. Due to some unlucky circumstances, not his fault, he finds himself in trouble with a bank examiner and faces the possibility of losing the business and even ending up in jail. Thinking everybody would have been better off if he'd never been born; George contemplates suicide only to be interrupted by Clarence, an angel that is seeking his wings. Clarence changes reality and suddenly George finds himself in a place that is Bedford Falls, but with a difference. It is a Bedford Falls in which he HAD never been born. He realizes that one person's life, can make all of the difference in the world.

About a month ago, at the end of a meeting that Doug and I were in, I asked him whether he would like me to take one of the Sundays in December. He quickly replied, "Do you want to take the 17th?" I figured that with Christmas Eve coming up the next week, when he usually preaches at like 27 services, he might like the Sunday before off. Later in the day I looked at the sermon series outline and noticed that the theme for the 17th was, "The Suffering Servant." Hmm. I looked a little further to see which scripture passage was scheduled for that day. It was Isaiah 53.

³ He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

⁴ Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;

and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

⁷ He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

I thought about this. A week before we celebrate the birth of Jesus, who would want to give a sermon about Isaiah's prophecy of his death? Obviously not Doug!.

Possibly some of you are thinking the same thing. Maybe you think this isn't appropriate leading up to Christmas. Maybe you think we should be thinking happier thoughts, like

- Santa and Presents
- Family and food – that's actually a picture from one of my favorite Christmas movies: A Muppet Christmas Carol. Michael Caine portrays a great Ebenezer Scrooge
- A baby in a manger

There is nothing wrong with enjoying Christmas. These are all wonderful parts of the Christmas season. Sometimes though, we get so caught up in it all – and I'm not just talking about the commercialization - that we forget the true meaning of it. And without this (picture of the Cross), then this (a baby in a manger) is just the birthday of another Jewish child.

As we look at Isaiah's writing, we see how accurate it was in prophesizing Jesus's death.

³ He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem

- Isaiah 53:3

There were many that followed him during his ministry – apostles, sure – but others as well. They flooded to see him when he spoke. When he arrived in Jerusalem he was hailed: "Hosanna, Hosanna," they shouted. This meant literally, "please save." And yet, a week later, he was mocked and ridiculed as he was paraded through the streets towards the cross. Why? Because as far as the people were concerned; he failed. He did not save them, as they expected. so they were taking their frustrations out on him.

⁴ Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,

yet we considered him punished by God,

stricken by him, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,

he was crushed for our iniquities;

the punishment that brought us peace was on him,

and by his wounds we are healed. - Isaiah 53:4-5

During his ministry he healed, both physically and spiritually. He did his best to show us the real meaning behind the scriptures. He wanted us to understand how to live, not just follow rules. And yet in the end, we didn't get it. So he took our sins upon himself; he took the punishment and made the sacrifice so that we could have life – and a relationship with God.

And yet I have to wonder; how much did Isaiah actually understand of this? Was the vision Isaiah received from God detailed? Crucifixion wasn't even invented when Isaiah prophesized. Did he actually see the extent of the beating; the ridicule and mocking; the nails driven into Him? Or was it just the words given to him; as difficult as that would be, maybe he didn't know exactly what would become

There was one other though, that did know the extent of what was to happen. And that was Jesus himself. I often wonder about that. We talk about how Jesus was fully human, and fully God but do we understand what that would have been like for him? We don't know much about Jesus's first 30 years. The gospels only mention two parts of his young life – His birth, and the time when he was 12, and travelled with his parents to Jerusalem and disappeared. The first hint that we have about what he knew, came during that trip. Remember? When his Mother told him they were searching for him, and he said, "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" - Luke 2:49

He knew who his Father was without anybody telling him. What else did he know? One of the blessings we get from God is hope. Part of that hope is not having the foreknowledge of when, and how, we will pass away. The Fully God 12 year old would know what was coming. What would a fully human 12-year old be thinking if he could see the death that lay ahead of him in another 20 years? Did he have nightmares about it? On numerous occasions later in his life, during his ministry, he shared his impending death with his disciples.

Jesus predicts his death 3 times (Matthew, Mark and Luke)

²¹ From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. - Matthew 16:21

¹⁷ Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them, ¹⁸ “We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death ¹⁹ and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!” – Matthew 20:17-19

When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, ² “As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.” Matthew 26:1-2

What was the balance between fully human and fully God? What if the human side had been dominant at any particular point?

He shows the human side in the Garden of Gethsemane. I usually read from the NIV Bible – the New International Version – as I did when I read earlier passages. But I am going to read this passage from the JSV Bible – the Jimmy Stewart Version.

³⁹ Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.” ⁴⁰ Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. He woke up Peter and the sons of Zebedee and they went and gathered the rest of the disciples. ⁴¹ They slipped out of the city and continued spreading the news of the kingdom of God wherever they went. - Matthew 26:39-41 JSV

Jesus might have continued his ministry and eventually died from some more normal cause of death. Saddened, his followers would bury him in a tomb. But what would have happened then? Would the disciples still be as convinced of his divinity and spread the Word with as much purpose and power? Without the resurrection, would Christianity spread and become a threat to the Jewish leaders. And if there wasn't a threat then a Pharisee named Saul would not have been persecuting Christians. He wouldn't have met Jesus on the road to Damascus and thus Paul never would write the letters that make up such a large part of the New Testament.

But Jesus wasn't George Bailey, and he didn't need a Clarence to show him the truth. He was FULLY God. And the NIV version reads

³⁹ Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” - Matthew 26:39

And in case you missed it, the key change here is, "Yet not as I will, but as you will." Jesus then went back to the disciples. He allowed himself to be arrested, tried, and convicted. He was beaten badly, forced to carry his cross through the streets of Jerusalem where he was mocked and ridiculed. And then he was nailed to that cross and hung to die. Why?

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;

and the Lord has laid on him

the iniquity of us all

7 He was oppressed and afflicted,

yet he did not open his mouth;

he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,

and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,

so he did not open his mouth. - Isaiah 53:6-7

At least he did not open his mouth to say, "Damn them all to Hell!?" No – Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." – Luke 23:34. And he did this by taking on the sins of the world. It's true that he was asking forgiveness for the Pharisees that accused him, the people of Jerusalem that ridiculed him, and the Romans for killing him. But make no mistake about it, he was also taking on my sins – and yours.

And yet, how many of us on Christmas morning, truly consider this gift that he gave to us. I have to admit that I've always had an excitement about Christmas. When I was young I was excited about the presents I would be getting. I'd have a hard time sleeping at night and would wake up early. But we had a rule that we could not go downstairs until all of us were ready; my two brothers and my sister – who took forever. As I grew up that sleeping problem at Christmas continued, only now it was more the excitement of seeing the joy on Michelle's or my children's faces. And I continued the rule of us all being ready before going to the tree. I remember the first Christmas after we were married. My step-son, Jimmy, out did me. In addition to having to wait for us, he also wasn't allowed to come and wake us up until 6:00 am. We were awake at 5:00 when he tiptoed from his room into ours to look at the clock. Seeing that it was only 5 am, he let out a huge sigh, and went back to his room, and bed. Ten minutes later he came in again – same result. For the next 50 minutes he would come in every 10 to 15 minutes while we tried to keep from bursting out laughing. Finally at 6 am he leaped on to our bed to "wake us up."

Eleven years ago things changed for me. Coming back to Woodside and bringing Jesus back into my life changed my focus. I still enjoy the presents under the tree, but they just aren't as important to me as the presence that is now in my heart.

We celebrate his life because of what he gave us at the Cross of Calvary. Next week while you are celebrating Christmas with family, or friends, and you are enjoying the giving and receiving of your gifts – take some time to give thanks for the important gifts, for the wonderful life he has given you.

Thank God – For the gift of Jesus

Thank Jesus – For the sacrifice he made for you.

Thank the Holy Spirit – For filling your heart with love, joy & fellowship.

Give thanks that because of these great gifts, It IS a wonderful life!

Please pray with me.

Dear Lord, I acknowledge that I am a sinner, and I need your forgiveness.

Thank you Jesus for dying for me and giving me eternal life.

Holy Spirit, transform my life so that I may bring glory and honor to you alone.