

**Victory of the Lamb // December 12, 2021 // Pastor Ben Sadler**  
**Series: *Christmas at the Movies* // Sermon: “Unexpectedly Wonderful”**

<sup>18</sup> This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup> Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

<sup>20</sup> But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

<sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

<sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. <sup>25</sup> But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

*It's a Wonderful Life* is considered one of the top 100 movies of all time. Which is surprising because when it was first released it was a box-office flop. But overtime more and more people started to appreciate the movie. Now it is considered a Christmas classic. It's been put on Public Domain. And it stood the test of time.

We are continuing our sermon series **Christmas at the Movies** and we are looking at classic Christmas films, exploring how they resonate with the greatest story ever told. So why has this movie done so well? Why has it stood the test of time?

Let's walk through the basic plot to find out. George Bailey is young, ambitious man who has big dreams to see the world and do something significant. But just as he is about to leave town, his father dies. And their family business the Bailey Brothers Building and Loan is about to be taken over by the evil Mr. Potter. So George Bailey decides to put his own dreams on hold to be loyal to his family and his community.

They run the business on a shoestring budget, doing what they can to help the community. Well, on Christmas Eve, George's uncle Billy loses an \$8,000 deposit on the way to the bank. George Bailey tries to find the deposit. He even goes to Mr. Potter for help. But nothing seems to work. He believes he will lose his business, lose his reputation, and probably go to jail for losing the money. He loses all hope.

In his fear and anxiety, he lashes out at his wife and kids. He goes to the bar and gets drunk. Then he walks out on to a nearby bridge and is contemplating committing suicide.

And this is where I believe the movie really connects with us all because all of us, at some level, have had our bridge moment. We have all had moments when we have lost hope. Maybe we have lost a loved one. Maybe we have fallen into some kind of moral failure and we are racked with guilt. Like George Bailey we look at our life from our perspective and we say, “I'm worth more dead than alive.”

So here is the question I want to answer today in this sermon: **How do we regain hope when we are on the bridge?** And to answer that question we are going to look at our text from Matthew 1.

Matthew writes: **This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about...** Every great hero has an origin story. Matthew is letting us know, this is Jesus' origin story. This is how the first Christmas started.

**His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph...** Mary and Joseph were engaged. Now marriage can be a big deal in our culture. We can take a year to plan for a wedding. And spend thousands of dollars on one day. But for Jews living 2000 years ago, it was an even bigger deal. Their wedding celebrations would last about a week. It was not so much just about two people become one family, but two families becoming one family. It was about joining two whole groups together.

For an ancient Jew, this was their greatest dream in life. Today people want independence and financial freedom. An ancient Israelite wanted a family and that was it. And so that is why this next line in the story was so devastating for Joseph: ... **but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit...** Before their wedding day Mary was pregnant. Now Matthew tells us how that happened. It was a miracle of the Holy Spirit. But Joseph didn't know that. He knew where babies come from. And if it didn't come from him, this child had another father.

Put yourself in Joseph's sandals. Infidelity and adultery are disturbing enough, but to get this news before you even get married! Joseph was depressed and lost hope. And so in his hopeless he decided to do something drastic. <sup>19</sup> **Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.**

This was Joseph's bridge moment. He had lost hope in his marriage so he decided to divorce Mary. He gave up on his dream to get married to Mary and move on.

Are any of you feeling hopeless right now? Have you contemplated doing something drastic like Joseph? Or maybe doing something as drastic as George Bailey? Like Joseph, you look at your life and you just can't find any hope in your current situation. Your best days seem to be behind you. You don't know how you are going to recover. Maybe you have destroyed your marriage or your finances. Maybe you have lost someone you love. Maybe you have destroyed your reputation through moral failing. And from your perspective there is no way that this is going to get any better.

Well, what happens to George Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life*? Right as he is about to jump off the bridge, a clumsy angel named Clarence appears and keeps George from taking his life in the moment. But George is still depressed and hopeless. He wishes that he was never born. And so Clarence grants his wish. He allows George Bailey to see what life would be like if he was never born. If George was never born, his brother would have died when he fell through the ice in their childhood. His wife would never had married. Many people in the town would never have had homes to live in. In essence, Clarence was trying to give George Bailey a different perspective of his life. When George lost hope all he could see were his problems and failures. He needed a different perspective, a new perspective on reality.

And that's the same thing that happens in Matthew's description of the Christmas story. When Joseph is about to make a drastic decision, God sends an angel to him to give him a different perspective. Matthew writes, <sup>20</sup> **But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream...** God sent an angel to Joseph.

And what did the angel say? **“Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.** Don’t be afraid to marry Mary. She was not unfaithful to you. God is at work in her. The Holy Spirit did a miracle in her womb because she is going to have a special baby.

And who is this baby? The angel goes on: <sup>21</sup> **She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.**” This baby will have a special name: Jesus. And Jesus is a Greek translation of the Hebrew name Hoshua, which means “The Lord saves”. The reason he will have this name is a because he will have the unique job of saving his people from their sins.

In fact, this special baby was not a new idea from God. God had been planning this since the very beginning. In fact, Isaiah the prophet prophesied this event over 700 years before Jesus as Matthew goes on to write: <sup>22</sup> **All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:** <sup>23</sup> **“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).** Another name that will be given to this child is Immanuel, which is a Hebrew word that means God with us. So this Jesus, our Savior, is also God, who has come to be with us.

So what is God teaching us through this story? **We have a limited view of reality.** Whether you are Joseph or George Bailey, we only have two eyes to see the world. And we only live in one limited spot in history. We don’t really know what God is up to. We don’t really know how our story will end. We don’t really know what God has been doing in the past, present or future. We make all sorts of judgments about our life, but we really don’t know what’s going on.

So what are we supposed to do? What is the answer to our opening question? **How do we regain hope when we are on the bridge? Live by faith, not by sight.** (2 Corinthians 5:7) Now what does that mean? Some people believe that “to live by faith” means that you live life contrary to reality. You just want something to be true but it really isn’t true, but you just believe it based on blind faith, something contrary to reality. But that is not what the authors of the Scriptures meant when they said *Live by faith, not by sight*. To live by faith, not by sight means to doubt your own small perspective of reality, and to live on God’s view of reality.

There is a book that is on my queue that I haven’t gotten to yet, entitled *Don’t believe everything you think*. I don’t know what the book is all about, but I really like the title. Don’t put your faith in your thoughts or your perspective. Instead, put your faith in God’s revelation, God’s view of the world.

But how do we get God’s view of the world? Well, I wish we could all get our own Christmas angel like Joseph and George Bailey to give us a revelation from God about what’s going on. But God doesn’t usually work that way. And I’m becoming convinced that is a good thing. Just think if we had to depend on our own personal visions of reality. There would be mass confusion. Instead, God has given us a clear revelation in Scripture about what he is up to in the world.

So what do we learn and see and hear about God’s perspective, even as we look at these few verse in Matthew? We hear that in Jesus, we have a Savior. His very name preaches that message. He has come to rescue us from all our guilt and shame. And he is going to resurrect us both body and soul to walk with him in a renewed world. But God’s gracious presence is not just something we will experience in the future. What did Matthew write? That Jesus was and continues to be Immanuel, God with us.

Whether you can see it or feel it or experience it in this moment, the truth is you are forgiven and rescued and loved and Jesus' presence is with you in love. Live by faith in God's perspective of reality and doubt your own view of reality.

And what happens when you do? Well, you start living like Joseph and even George Bailey. The Scriptures say, <sup>24</sup> **When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.** <sup>25</sup> **But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.**

He lived by faith in God's revelation. Nothing really changed. Mary was still pregnant with a child that didn't come from Joseph. They were still in a challenging situation, but because he lived by faith in God's revelation, he got up, married Mary, and when the baby came, he named him Jesus.

Basically, something similar happened with George Bailey. After the angel, Clarence, left him his circumstances didn't really change. He was still stuck in Bedford Falls. He was still out \$8000. He was still potentially going to go to jail on Christmas Eve. But his perspective had changed. He lived by faith in God's revelation that his life had meaning and purpose, so he went home, hugged and kissed his wife and kids no matter what was going to happen to him.

And the same is true for you, your circumstances have not changed during the time that you have been in worship. You still might have health issues. Your marriage might still be failing. Your finances might still be a mess. But I pray your perspective has changed. I pray that you now live by faith that you have Jesus, who will save you from all that is wrong in your life, and you live by faith in Jesus, the Immanuel, God with us. And not by your limited sight of your problems.

That's why the movie is called *It's a Wonderful Life*. You see, life can always be wonderful if you live by faith, viewing your life and the world from God's perspective. Don't believe everything you can see. Don't believe everything you think. Live by faith, not by sight. Live by faith in Jesus, our Savior, our Immanuel, and you will always have a *Wonderful Life*. Amen.