**CONTRASTS**

***#2 – The Abundant Life vs The Minimal Life***

George Bailey. Recognize that name? Mr. Potter. Recognize that name?
It’s A Wonderful Life. Recognize that classic movie from 1946?

George Bailey (Jimmy Stewart) longs to get out of Bedford Falls and live it up in exotic places and do exciting things. The old Savings & Loan he inherits keeps him shackled to his job and to this small Americana town. He helps so many people secure their homes that greedy Mr. Potter (Lionel Barrymore) would not help. When George’s absent-minded uncle loses their deposit money this sends him into deep despair. He decides to take his life in order to leave Mary (Donna Reed) and the kids his life insurance policy. Enter Clarence, the Angel 2nd Class who is trying to earn his wings. He comes up with a scheme when he hears George say, “I wish I had never been born.” He grants the wish and learns just how many people had been impacted by his life of generosity. He had a wonderful life all along and didn’t know it. He learned life is not in places and possessions, but in people. Oh yeah, the angel got his wings. Atta boy Clarence!

Great movie. One of the best! Two thumbs up.

But I’ve got a better one for you. I wish Frank Capra could direct an accurate big screen presentation of “*The Abundant Life*.” The script is found in John 10:1-10. The main characters are The Good Shepherd (played by Jesus), The Thief (played by the Pharisees – 9:40), and The Sheep (played by all disciples of Christ… just think, it’s your great chance to win an Oscar in a supporting role). I’m sure it wouldn’t garner an Academy Award for Best Picture, or even a nomination. Hollywood and the world prefer action movies with blood and sex.

The plot shows a contrast between the Good Shepherd’s voice and the voice of a Stranger (i.e. false teachers, world philosophers, Hollywood, Madison Avenue). The Sheep who hear the Lord’s voice enter into the security of the sheepfold. He becomes the Door of both entrance and exit. The scene depicts the Thief attempting to jump over the stone wall in order to steal the sheep, enticing them to find greener pastures on the other side of the fence. As long as the Sheep (us) listen to the Shepherd’s voice (trust and obey), they will not long for “*the far country*” and end up feeding swine (Lk. 15:13-16). They, like the prodigal son, learn in the end that the Father offered them “*the abundant life*” all along. Oh yeah, each earned their wings and were carried by angels to Paradise (Lk. 16:22). The sheep lived happily ever after. The end.

*“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”* (John 10:10)

Read that first sentence again. The “thief” was not a bank robber, a mob boss in the Chicago Syndicate, or a thug during a riot. As we said previously, the thief was a Bible teacher! All the Pharisees ever wanted was the applause of men, not the reward of God. They got their reward (Matt. 6:1-18). Thieves and robbers are takers, not givers.

Satan, the angel who earned his wings on the Dark Side, now spends his days whispering sweet lies to entice Christ’s flock to bolt over the wall and escape this Minimal life to “*enjoy the passing pleasures of sin*” (Heb. 11:25). The father of lies whispers: “Can there be anything greater than the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life?” (I Jn. 2:15). Moses heard that for 40 years. No doubt he was temporarily drawn to that idea. But then the training of Amram and Jochebed, his parents, kicked in and he made a decision to “*esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward*” (Heb. 11:26). A millennium and a half later we see him standing with Elijah and Jesus on that mountaintop in radiant glory! (Matt. 17:3). Moses earned his wings.

Let’s be frank. Are you happy? I mean, really, really happy? Deep down in your soul happy? Does a verse like Mark 10:29-30 get your motor running and juices flowing?

*“Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life.”*

That verse sounded great until Jesus threw in “*with persecutions*.” The Christian’s life, which is the Abundant Life, comes with a caveat. “*All that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*” (2 Tim. 3:12). Like Jesus. Like Paul. Like Stephen. Like all believers who receive a hundredfold blessings now, and eternal life in the age to come.

But I digress. Let me ask you the question again: Are you happy? Jesus said He came to earth to “*give you* ***life***.” The normal word for “life” is *BIO*, which is what God breathed into man at creation (Gen. 2:7). Bio-graphy is the “life” of someone. Bio-ology is the study of life. But that’s not what Jesus said here. He came to give us *ZOE*. That doesn’t mean to breath, but to truly live to the limit. It means to discover the meaning of life and embrace it, discovering your purpose on earth and how to glorify your Maker!

Notice, Jesus didn’t stop with simply saying He came to give you a happy, satisfied life. He poured it on thick and heavy. He said that we might experience it “*abundantly.”* That word is *PERISSOS* and is defined as “over and above, super abundant, superior, surpassing all other things.” Which leads me to ask once more, “Are you living the super-abundant life?” You might have all kinds of issues plaguing you (hurtful relationships, bad health, financial woes), but what Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is offering His flock is not outward peace and joy, but “*a joy that no man can take from you*” (Jn. 16:22). A “*peace that surpasses understanding*” (Phil. 4:7). Now that’s living large!

Contrasts. Take a piece of paper and draw a line down the middle. Head one PRO and the other CON. Beside those words write ABUNDANT, then MINIMAL. This allows you to make a decision having weighed all the options. George Bailey was blessed to look back and see all the little things that had impacted so many people. Standing at the bridge in a snowstorm he calls to Clarence, “I want to live again. I want to live again!” The scene ends with him holding Zuzu and her petals, surrounded by his loved ones, and everyone in Bedford Falls singing his praises. It was a classic. But fiction!

Our story is not fiction, but fact. I don’t live in Bedford Falls, but the Kingdom of Heaven. I’m living the superabundant life NOW, and will continue to live it into Eternity.

Until tomorrow… Are you happy? You can be! Jesus is tenderly calling.

I love you. Rick