

**Review (30): Faith-Rest Drill: Self-Determinism, Galatians 5:19-21;
Illustration of the Decrees: *It's A Wonderful Life*: Intro, Synopsis,
Cast**

[NOTE: This lesson (JSH-182) is a review of JSH-151 (partial) taught Thursday, 17 June, JSH-152 taught Sunday (first session), 20 June, and JSH-153 taught Sunday (second session), 20 June 1999. For class notes please reference these lesson numbers. JBG]

[NOTE: What follows is an addendum to the review just completed. It is an update of a similar study taught Sunday, 25 January 1987 (both sessions). JBG]

It's a Wonderful Life

A Dramatic Illustration of the Doctrine of Divine Decrees

I. Introduction:

In the early 1940s Philip Van Doren Stern wrote a short story entitled *The Greatest Gift*. He published 200 copies and distributed them as Christmas greetings to friends and relatives. Somehow Hollywood obtained a copy and offered him \$10,000 for movie rights. The screenplay was written three times but none measured up to the level required by the studio to put it into production. Eventually the studio sold the screen rights to Republic Pictures for its original \$10,000 investment plus the three unused scripts. Republic later assigned the project to Frank Capra. He hired two of the industry's best screenwriters in Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett to redo the scripts and Capra meanwhile began to cast his movie.

He chose James Stewart to play the lead role of George Bailey. Stewart had been away from moviemaking for about six years, serving in the Army Air Corps during World War II and was concerned that such a long period away from the cameras would have a detrimental effect on his performance. Although *It's a Wonderful Life* was nominated for five Academy Awards, winning none, and was a disappointment at the box office, it became Stewart's favorite role and Capra's favorite movie. Over time it has become one of America's most revered motion pictures of all time, currently ranked 24 among the best 100 movies of the century.

I have chosen *It's a Wonderful Life* to illustrate the principles we have recently studied and just reviewed in the Doctrine of Divine Decrees. It is hard to imagine that there could be one among you who has not seen this movie. In your case this study is going to have little if any success in illustrating the doctrine for you. However, I am sure that most of you have seen the movie and some have even taken my advice and watched it during the past week. For you, it should be helpful.

I think we need to start with a brief synopsis of the movie. I will quote straight from the back of the video tape box for that, followed by some interesting information on the actors who played major roles in the movie.

II. Synopsis:

Liner notes from Frank Capra's Original "It's a Wonderful Life." Video tape (VHS 2071). Los Angeles: Republic Entertainment, Inc., 1995.

George has a lifelong dream — to get out of tiny Bedford Falls to see the world and do great things. But every time he tries to leave, a crisis for the people of the town arises, and his heart won't let him abandon them. So when, after years of self-sacrifice, disaster strikes the Bailey Building and Loan on Christmas Eve, all George's struggles appear to have been fought for nothing. That's when Clarence, an angel trying to earn his wings, is sent down from heaven to give George the greatest Christmas gift of all: seeing how wonderful his life really is.

III. Major Cast Members:

James Stewart as George Bailey

Won an Academy Award in 1940 for Best Actor for his performance in *The Philadelphia Story*. He starred in movies of several genres—Westerns such as *Destry Rides Again*, *Winchester '73*, *Bend in the River*, *Naked Spur*, *Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, *The Cheyenne Social Club*, and *The Shootist*; dramas, including *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Anatomy of a Murder*, *The Spirit of St. Louis*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *Rear Window*, *Shenandoah*, and *The Shop around the Corner* (the original recently redone as *You've Got Mail*); comedies such as *Harvey*, and even a baseball player in *The Monty Stratton Story*. He was Glen Miller in *The Glen Miller Story* and Buttons the Clown in *The Greatest Show on Earth*.

Donna Reed as Mary Hatch Bailey

Donna won an Academy Award in 1953 for Best Supporting Actress in ***From Here to Eternity***. She also starred in ***The Picture of Dorian Gray***, ***The Last Time I Saw Paris***, and ***The Benny Goodman Story***. Many of you who can remember television from the '60s recall ***The Donna Reed Show*** which ran from 1958 through 1966. But do you remember she was Miss Ellie Ewing on ***Dallas***? Yes, she briefly replaced Barbara Bel Geddes for the 1984-85 season.

Lionel Barrymore as Henry Potter

Barrymore is a legend in Hollywood and won an Academy Award in 1931 for Best Actor in ***A Free Soul***. He starred as Dr. Leonard Gillespie in a series of movies in the '30s and '40s about Dr. James Kildare from which came the television series later on. His other movies include ***Duel in the Sun*** with Gregory Peck and ***Key Largo*** with Humphrey Bogart.

Thomas Mitchell as Uncle Billy Bailey

Mitchell won an Academy Award as Best Supporting Actor for his role in John Ford's ***Stagecoach*** starring John Wayne. He appeared with Gary Cooper in ***High Noon***, with James Stewart in ***Mr. Smith Goes to Washington***, and as Scarlet O'Hara's father in ***Gone with the Wind***. He also played William Robinson in ***Swiss Family Robinson***.

Henry Travers as AS2 Clarence Oddbody

Travers was the perfect pick for the slowly advancing angel, Clarence. In the story he had not yet earned his wings and helping George Bailey overcome depression was the task that would finally gain him the promotion. Travers also starred in ***The Bells of St. Mary's***, ***Mrs. Miniver***, and ***Dark Victory*** with Bette Davis, Humphrey Bogart, and Ronald Reagan.

Ward Bond as Bert the Policeman

Again, you older members remember Ward Bond as Major Seth Adams on the television series ***Wagon Train*** which ran from 1957 through 1961. He starred with John Wayne in several of his movies including ***Rio Bravo***, ***The Searchers***, ***Hondo***, and ***The Quiet Man***. Bond was Morgan Earp in John Ford's ***My Darling Clementine***, along with Henry Fonda as Wyatt, Colonel Thieme's old friend Tim Holt, who played Virgil, Victor Mature as Doc Holliday, and Walter Brennan as Old Man Clanton.

H. B. Warner as Mr. Gower the Druggist

Gower also appeared with James Stewart in ***Mr. Smith Goes to Washington***. He also starred in such biblical epics such as ***The Ten Commandments*** in which he appeared as Amminadab and Cecil B. DeMille's 1927 classic ***Kings of Kings*** in which Warner played Jesus. He was nominated for Best Supporting Actor in 1938 for his role in ***Lost Horizon***.

Sheldon Leonard as Nick the Bartender

Leonard had a very small role in this movie and did not have as distinguished an acting career as did his costars in *It's a Wonderful Life*. For example, you probably don't know that Sheldon Leonard appeared in Frank Capra's ***Pocket Full of Miracles***, or in ***Guys and Dolls*** with Marlon Brando and Frank Sinatra, or in ***Rainbow over Texas*** with Roy Rogers and Dale Evans. However, each and every one of you is familiar with his work as the executive producer of a number of universally popular television series.

Leonard was the executive producer for the mid-'60s television detective series ***I Spy***. This show broke new ground for television by casting a black actor in a lead role. Leonard cast as Robert Culp's partner none other than Bill Cosby. Other series of which Leonard was executive producer include ***Make Room for Daddy*** or ***The Danny Thomas Show***, ***The Dick Van Dyke Show***, and ***The Andy Griffith Show***.

Other Actors:

Beulah Bondi as Mrs. Bailey, George's mother

Gloria Grahame as Violet. (She won an Oscar for the Best Supporting Actress in 1952 for ***The Bad and the Beautiful***.)

Todd Karns as Harry Bailey, George's brother

Samuel S. Hinds as Pa Bailey, George's father

Bobby Anderson, played George Bailey as a child

George and Mary Bailey's children were played by:

Carol Coomes as Janie Bailey

Karolyn Grimes as Zuzu Bailey

Jimmy Hawkins as Tommy Bailey

Larry Simms as Pete Bailey

None of these child actors ever went into acting as a career although Larry Simms, who played Pete Bailey, starred as Alexander Bumstead in a series of movies based on the comic strip, "Blondie."