

Review (67): *It's a Wonderful Life*: Events Leading up to George's Discouragement: Evil Overcome by Good, Psm 76:10; Gen 29-50

VI. Commentary on *It's a Wonderful Life*: Events Leading up to George's Discouragement:

- 1- Now that George and Mary are married they might have expected to lead normal lives as a happily married couple in cozy Bedford Falls.
- 2- But, as John "Doc" Holliday would say, "There is no normal life, George, there's just life." And circumstances again intervene to cancel George's plans, this time his honeymoon.
- 3- As they were leaving town for a European honeymoon the advent of the Great Depression caused runs on banks and those in Bedford Falls were no exception including the Bailey Bros. Building & Loan.
- 4- Henry Potter bailed out the bank and offered to do so for the Building & Loan. George turned him down but Potter threatened to withdraw his backing of the Association if it closed before six o'clock that afternoon.
- 5- Mary, seeing the desperate situation faced by her husband, offered the idea of using their vacation money to fund the run on the Building & Loan. George accepted the idea and it saved the Association but he and Mary had to spend their honeymoon in an abandoned old house at 320 Sycamore.
- 6- Years later, George had rebuilt the Building & Loan while Potter owned everything else in town. In an effort to pull off the coup de grace, Potter offered George \$20,000 a year to go to work for him.
- 7- For George it was a temptation that promised material prosperity at the expense of personal integrity. George would get a nice living but the Building & Loan would go to Potter and the people's mortgages that were underwritten by the association would fall under Potter's supervision.
- 8- George turned him down with a little extemporaneous speech that included a little doctrinal flavoring:

George: You just sit around here and you spin your little webs and you think the whole world revolves around you and your money. Well, it doesn't, Mr. Potter. In the whole vast configuration of things, you're nothing but a scurvy little spider.
- 9- George's reference to "the whole vast configuration of things" reminds us of this principle from our study of the doctrine of the divine decrees:

PRINCIPLE: The decrees of God are all comprehensive. Not the slightest confusion could exist as to one of even the smallest events without confusion to all events. All events are interwoven and interdependent.

The human good and evil presented by Henry Potter reminds us of this principle in:

Psalm 76:10 - The wrath of men shall praise Him.
- 10- This means that even when the unfairness, human good, evil, and wrongdoing of others assault the believer, he should remember that God is able to always turn evil into good.
- 11- One of the most instructive episodes in the Old Testament on this subject is that of Joseph and his brothers. His father, **Jacob**, had twelve sons by four different women:

LEAH

1. REUBEN
2. SIMEON
3. LEVI
4. JUDAH

BILHAH

5. DAN
6. NAPHTALI

ZILPAH

7. GAD
8. ASHER

RACHEL

11. JOSEPH
12. BENJAMIN

9. ISSACHAR
10. ZEBULUN

- 12- As you should recall, Jacob's right woman was Rachel. She was brought to him by the Lord in Genesis 29:9-11. Her father was Jacob's uncle, Laban, the brother of his mother, Rebekah.
- 13- Jacob served Laban for a while and was ultimately invited to take his pick of Laban's two daughters as wages. Leah was the oldest but Rachel, the youngest, was Jacob's choice. Laban tricked Jacob by pawning Leah off on him. Laban then told Jacob if he served him for seven more years he would throw Rachel in on the deal. Jacob agreed.
- 14- Each of these women had ladies-in-waiting known as "maids." Rachel's was named Bilhah and Leah's was named Zilpah.
- 15- Leah had Jacob's first four children, the firstborn being Reuben. The first 10 children were the offspring of either Leah or the two maids while Rachel remained barren.
- 16- Finally in Genesis 30:23-24 Rachel gave birth to Joseph and ultimately to Benjamin. Joseph was the firstborn of Jacob's true wife, Rachael, and thus became his legitimate firstborn son.
- 17- When it came time to decide who would receive the double portion of his inheritance, a custom reserved strictly for the firstborn male, Jacob chose Joseph.
- 18- Jealousy and envy so infected the older ten brothers that all but Reuben conspired to kill Joseph. Reuben finally persuaded them to just throw him into a pit. Later an Arabian caravan came by and Judah came up with the idea of selling Joseph to them. All but Reuben agreed and they turned their brother over to the Arabs for twenty shekels of silver. They then dipped Joseph's tunic in goat's blood and sent it back home to Jacob with the news that a wild beast had killed him.
- 19- Instead Joseph was alive and well having been sold into Egyptian slavery by the Arabs, a business the Arabs have for a long time been engaged all the way down to selling of African refugees to northern slave traders during the War between the States. Joseph ultimately caught the eye of the Pharaoh Potipher. After a few years Joseph was able to impress Potipher by interpreting his dreams and as a result was promoted to the second highest office in the land, a position similar to that of Prime Minister.
- 20- One of Joseph's major achievements in Egyptian domestic policy was to institute a system of storing grain in the event of famine. After seven years of prosperity a famine did indeed strike the land and, according to Genesis 41:56, it "spread over all the face of the earth." This, of course, included Canaan where his family still lived. Jacob sent all of his sons but Benjamin to Egypt to purchase grain in order to avert the famine. There, after a bit of intrigue by Joseph, they discovered their brother was Prime Minister.
- 21- When Joseph first revealed his identity to his brothers he made a statement that is not only filled with forgiveness and unconditional love but also contains a clear understanding of the plan of God and the doctrine of divine decrees:

Genesis 45:4 - And Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me." And they came closer. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.

v 5 - “And now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.

v 6 - “For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting.

v 7 - “And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance.

v 8 - “Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a counselor to Pharaoh, lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt.”

- 22- In this statement Joseph recognizes the overruling will of God in His control of history. He did not consider his brothers’ attempt to kill him as something that should be held against them. Instead he viewed it as a necessary part of God’s plan in order to take him to Egypt so he could preserve his family during the famine.
- 23- Those who are grace oriented perceive all events of their lives as things that have been decreed by divine sovereignty and understood to be a reality by divine omniscience. In order for God to bring human volition to the point where He can bless those who submit to His Word, He must control history in three ways: by His (1) directive, (2) permissive, and (3) overruling wills.
- 24- It was God’s directive will that imposed a global famine by means of weather. It was the divine intent to use this time of crisis to convert the family of Israel into the nation of Israel.
- 25- It was God’s permissive will that allowed Joseph’s brothers to plot his demise. Note God did not “permit” them to kill him.
- 26- Instead it was God’s overruling will that Joseph’s life be spared and taken to Egypt where he became Prime Minister and possessed the power to save the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob from famine.
- 27- Joseph’s understanding of the will of God, the plan of God, and the divine decrees enabled him to forgive his brothers, an attitude clearly expressed by him following the burial of Jacob.

Genesis 50:15 - When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “What if Joseph should bear a grudge against us and pay us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!”

NOTE: On several occasions have I illustrated for you the interconnectedness of the Word of God by referring to the Bible as a tapestry. The doctrinal threads of warp and woof interlace throughout the text not only linking doctrine to doctrine but also repeating certain concepts over and over in various contexts. Several concepts we have recently studied are mentioned here in verse 15. The brothers assume Joseph will bear a grudge against his own people and will seek revenge now that their father is dead. The brothers rationalize that Joseph will justify their demise because of their wrongdoing toward him. But Joseph will demonstrate a pre-Mosaic Law understanding of the Royal Law.

Genesis 50:16 - So they sent a message to Joseph saying, “Your father charged before he died, saying,

v 17 - ‘Thus you shall say to Joseph, “Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong.” And now, please, forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

v 18 - Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your servants.”

v 19 - But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place?

v 20 - "And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

v 21 - "So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

- 28- I have chosen this passage to emphasize the principles that come out in George Bailey's dealings with Henry Potter. Potter offers a temptation that every person faces in the hostile environment of the devil's world. We are engaged in the Angelic Conflict and thus must often prove our metal under pressure by standing up to those temptations.
- 29- Henry Potter served as an outside pressure offering potential prosperity on this occasion as he tempted George's monetary lust.
- 30- George, for a brief few moments, considered betraying his customers at the Building & Loan by turning their debts over to the dreaded Mr. Potter.
- 31- George was invited to Potter's office and when there was offered a goodly amount of money in exchange for his integrity.
- 32- Henry Potter meant it for evil but God meant it for good.