

Christmas at the Movies 2021

The Family Man

December 12, 2021

Good morning everyone.

That song is a great way to kick off movie number two in our *Christmas at the Movies* series.

I'm curious ...

- How many of you have seen today's movie – *The Family Man*?
- How many of you actually like Nicholas Cage as an actor?
- How many of you didn't see *The Family Man* because you don't like Nicholas Cage?

That's your loss because this is a great story

with echoes of *It's a Wonderful Life*, *A Christmas Carol* and even a bit of a *Groundhog Day* feel to it ...

... especially in some of the dialogue between Jack (played by Nicholas Cage) and Kate (played by Tea Leoni).

In fact, it's *such* a great story that I'm a little worried that what I want to do with it today is going to get overwhelmed by the *romantic* emphasis of the film – which is very strong.

But I suppose if all you get out of this is what the *filmmakers* are trying to say, that's a win, too.

That said, I *do* hope you'll be able see the *spiritual* analogy that might actually change your life in ways that have nothing to with romantic love.

So, let's get into it.

The Story

And let's begin by laying out the framework of the story – looking at what actually happens – and then we'll see what it might have to say about us and about God ...

... which, by the way – and if this is your very first time with us you need to know this ...

Something Jesus would do all the time is to tell a story that had *nothing* to do with God to make a point that had *everything* to do with God.

And that's what we're trying to do with this movie as well as the others in this series.

Anyway, we've already introduced the main characters, Jack and Kate, who we meet in the opening scene.

They've recently graduated from college and

are planning to get married. But, before they do, they've decided to take a year apart so that they each can pursue an opportunity that will greatly advance their careers.

But, at the last minute, Kate has second thoughts.

Let's watch.

Video Clip

Now, Jack – being an idiot – gets on the plane and Kate's fear becomes reality. We aren't shown how it happens, but their relationship comes to an end.

And Jack goes on to become a high-powered Wall Street broker and for 13 years he leads a life that features ...

- Expensive suits

- Gourmet restaurants
- Snazzy sports cars
- A luxury apartment in downtown Manhattan
- And one-night stands

And he's *quite happy* with that life and *with himself*. He's got it made.

But something happens to him on Christmas Eve that will change everything – including his definition of happiness.

That afternoon while working on a huge deal, he gets a note from his secretary that Kate has called – which is strange because they've had no contact for many years.

But he doesn't call her back.

“It’s Christmas Eve,” he says, “and she’s probably lonely, probably pining for ‘the one that got away’” because, after all, he *is* such a “catch.”

Anyway ... later that evening, as he is walking home to his apartment, he decides to pick up some eggnog.

And while he is in the store, he stops what *appears to be* a robbery by offering to personally give the “robber” the money he’s demanding from the store clerk.

The man agrees but as the two of them walk out together, it becomes apparent that this “robber” is not an ordinary person.

As we watch, notice what appears in the background of the scene.

Here we go.

Video Clip

Did you see what was in the background? A cross, right?

By no means is this a “Christian movie,” but the presence of the cross is clearly meant to tip us off that something supernatural is taking place *and* – based on what the “angel” says – is *about* to take place.

And what’s about to take place is where this movie begins to echo *It’s a Wonderful Life*, *A Christmas Carol* and *Groundhog Day* because Jack is going to have a totally unexpected and unwelcome experience.

He’s going to fall asleep in his own bed that night and, in the morning, wake up in ...

Well, let’s watch.

Video Clip

“Merry Christmas to ya” indeed!

Somehow, Jack has been transported from *his* reality into a *very different* reality which includes ...

- Kate as his wife
- Their two small children
- A huge hound of a dog
- And Kate’s parents, Lorraine and Big Ed ...

... for whom he works ... as a tire salesman ... in New Jersey.

Obviously, this is a shocking turn of events, so Jack ...

- Runs out the door

- Gets into the beat-up minivan (which he would never own in a million years)
- And drives back to his apartment in Manhattan

... where, of course, no one knows him because *that* life isn't *this* life.

And as he is stumbling down the street, the “robber” from the night before “just happens to” drive up in Jack’s fancy car and offer him a ride ... and an explanation.

Check it out.

Video Clip

And Jack *is* working on a new deal – a glimpse, not of what the world *would be like* without him (as George Bailey received in *It's a Wonderful Life*).

Instead, Jack is going to get a glimpse of what his life *could have been like* if he had not gone to London and, instead, married Kate.

And though he obviously doesn't appreciate it at this point, in reality he's a very fortunate man.

In fact, you probably didn't read it since it happened so fast, but the sign on the side of the bus said, "Sit here, get lucky" ...

... which I thought was pretty cool because where Jack is "sitting" at that very moment will turn out to be a very lucky place for him.

Now, rest of the story is Jack basically getting that glimpse of his "could have been" life.

... which makes for some pretty good comedy because Jack isn't used to being a husband and a dad ...

... but, also, some tension because Jack isn't used to doing without the finer things and he misses his job.

Eventually, however – and it takes a while as the “angel” had foretold – Jack actually begins to enjoy his new life and becomes “a family man.”

And he slowly comes to a realization that will eventually change his destiny.

Let's watch.

Video Clip

For all this time – 13 years – in spite of the path he had chosen, deep down, he had never stopped loving Kate.

And that realization – that *revelation* – is so powerful that when “the glimpse” ends and Jack finally wakes up alone in his Manhattan

apartment on Christmas morning ...

... instead of closing the mega deal that afternoon as he had planned, he calls Kate and goes to *her* apartment only to discover that ...

- While he had been pursuing *his* goals, she had become a high-powered lawyer.
- And she is moving to Paris. Her flight leaves that evening.
- And the reason she called him wasn't because she was lonely.
- It was because, in packing, she had come across some of his belongings and just wanted to return them.

And it's clear she has no feelings whatsoever for Jack because she had "moved on" long ago.

Ah ... but Jack has *seen a glimpse* of how everything could be different.

So that evening, he goes to the airport and stops her as she is about to board the plane.

And, in front of all the other passengers, begins to tell her in great detail what he has “seen” of their life together.

And because “this Kate” hasn’t experienced anything of the “other Kate” and her life, she doesn’t know what to make of it.

But watch what happens.

Video Clip

And that’s the way the movie ends – with Jack and Kate talking over coffee.

So, do they get together and turn Jack’s glimpse into reality?

Maybe. Maybe not. The filmmakers have left it to us to decide.

I'm an optimist so I think they do.

Takeaways

Now there are so many good things that could be drawn out of this movie.

1. One obvious takeaway is that *love truly is greater than everything else.*

And we could focus on that but, we literally just finished a series about love called, amazingly, *Greater Than Everything* ... so that would be redundant.

If you're new or missed that series, you can find the video and transcript of each message in the media section of our website and app.

2. Another possible takeaway is that your relationship with money determines your destiny.

It's easy to miss because it goes by so fast and it's only said once, but the name of the "angel" is "Cash Money" which is an odd name for a character ...

Except that every time he shows up – and there are three of those times – people are tested with something related to money.

Specifically ...

- Will they be prejudiced against someone of another race?
- Will they be generous?
- Will they be honest?

So, I thought about chasing down that angle

because Jesus had more to say about money than everything else other than the “Kingdom of God” ...

... which was His shorthand way of describing the kind of life where God is in charge of your life (instead of you or anyone else or the world at large).

He said things like ...

- If you're faithful with little, you will be faithful with much. So be faithful with what God gives you and he will give you more.
- Only a fool would spend their life on acquiring things instead of becoming rich towards God. So be rich towards God.
- Love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. (It's not money itself that brings evil. It's *love of money*). So don't love money.ⁱ

Furthermore, whenever Jesus talked about God's Kingdom, money was one of His most typical illustrations.

In fact, he once said ...

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure" ...

Like lots and lots of "cash money" that has been ...

... hidden in a field.

When a man found [the treasure], he hid it again ...

... because he didn't want anyone else finding it ...

"... and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field." Matthew 13:44 (NIV)

Jesus' point was that God's Kingdom is so valuable that it is worth giving up everything else in order to possess it; to be part of it.

However, as much I like both of those takeaways, I decided that what might be even more interesting and helpful is to look more closely at what brought about the dramatic change in Jack's life ...

... so much so that by the end of the movie, he is 180 degrees from where it all began. *He* is begging *Kate* not to go!

What Changes Us

Of course, what I *really* want to talk about isn't so much what changes *Jack*. He's just a silly character in a sappy movie.

The *real* issue – what *really* matters – is *what changes us ... AND ...* where does God show up in

the process?

So, in the time that remains we're going to look at both of those because this movie illustrates it so well.

Three things happen to Jack which, as it turns out, are three things God typically orchestrates in your life and mine to help us change.

The first one is basically what this whole movie is about, which is ...

1. A glimpse of a better reality.

... which was kind of hard to accomplish for Jack because, as he told Cash, "I got everything I need."

He was very happy with his life as it was and, therefore, he wasn't *looking* for a better one.

Years ago, I heard a wise person say that ...

People change when they hurt enough that they have to, learn enough that they want to and receive enough that they are able to.

But Jack wasn't hurting in the least, so he had to be *shown* a better way. He had to *learn enough* about it so that he would *want* to live that better way.

Probably the scene that best illustrates Jack "learning" is when he finds a video of a birthday party for Kate in which he sees himself *creating* a very different kind of life than he could have ever imagined.

I'll warn you in advance: you might want to have a Kleenex handy. I've needed one every time I've seen this clip.

Let's watch.

Video Clip

Now, let's be honest.

You felt a lump in your throat, maybe even had a tear in your eye.

You know why? Because when you see that – even knowing it's just a goofy movie – your heart longs for that kind of life to be real.

That longing – that emotion – is a sign, friends, that something greater than the reality you're living right now – even if it's a good one – is still out there somewhere.

And you've just gotten a glimpse of it.

So, the first component of change – especially for people who aren't hurting so much that they *have* to change – is a glimpse of a better reality.

2. The second thing that changes us is a radical acceptance in spite of our failures (which is also called “grace”).

We saw an amazing illustration of “grace” in last week’s movie, *Dr. Seuss’ The Grinch*.

And there’s another great one in this movie, as well.

As we’ve seen ...

- Jack is thrown into *a life* he knows nothing about ...
- ... which demands him to be an expert in *things* he knows nothing about ...

... like changing a diaper.

And, in this clip we’re going to watch, Jack has just failed miserably in his first attempt, which is when his “glimpse daughter” (Annie) realizes that something is “off” about him.

Let’s watch.

Video Clip

That is the cutest kid *ever* in a movie.

And the grace she gives him is also *cute*, but what Jack discovers over time is a grace that's not cute.

Instead, it's strong and it's tough and it comes from his "glimpse wife" Kate who never sugarcoats his failures but constantly treats him far better than he's earned.

In fact, it is immediately obvious that Jack as he *truly* is in real life – "Wall Street Jack" let's call him – doesn't *deserve* the better life he's getting to experience, nor does he deserve the depth to which she loves him.

But she does, even to the point of great personal sacrifice ...

3. Call it “sacrificial love” – which is the final motivator of change that we see illustrated.

At some point in the story, after Jack has finally embraced his “glimpse life” ...

... unbeknownst to Kate, he goes down to Wall Street and actually gets a job offer from the investment firm where he worked in his real life.

And then he tries to convince Kate that it would be best for them to leave NJ and move to the city so he can take the job.

Let’s watch.

Video Clip

Oh, baby, that is a tear-jerker of a scene!

And it’s receiving that kind of love – a love that’s willing to *sacrifice* – along with her grace

towards him that motivates “real life” Jack to chase her down as she’s about to fly out of his life.

You & God

Now, I’ve spent a lot of time on the story of this movie today – probably more than I do in most other movie messages.

And I’m a little uncomfortable with that because, again, this is such an emotional and romantic story that it would be very easy to just leave it at that.

So, I want you to listen very closely for the next few minutes or so because I hope you will walk out of here (or turn off the livestream) understanding three things about you and God
...

... and maybe in a way you never have before

because of a silly, sappy movie starring a guy you don't even like.

1. If you are hearing my voice today, that is God giving you a glimpse of a better way and inviting you to learn more.

... because people *can't* change until they *learn enough* that they want to.

Jesus once said something about this that's somewhat perplexing to me.

He said ...

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them." John 6:44 (NIV)

I don't know why it works that way but *not everyone gets a glimpse* of the kind of life that's possible when you come to Jesus and follow Him.

On one occasion he told his Apostles ...

“Blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.

“For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.”

Matthew 13:16-17 (NIV)

The fact that you are here or watching right now

...

- Means that, for some reason, *you* are blessed.
- It means that God is drawing you.
- It means God is saying to you “come to me and learn from me what it’s like to be part of My Kingdom.”

And He wants you to have a glimpse – and keep on having glimpses – so that you would desire to live it because people change when they *learn enough* that they want to.

Second thing I want you to know about you and God is that ...

2. Even though your life demonstrates that you are not deserving of a better way (or even a glimpse of it), God accepts you without demanding that you change.

... because people *can't* change until they *receive* enough that they are *able* to ... just like Jack in the movie.

That's radical. That's grace.

In one of his letters, the Apostle Paul wrote that ...

*God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance ...
Romans 2:4 (NIV)*

... which means that God's grace – God's radical acceptance of you just as you are and not as you should be – is intended to lead you to rethink not only your life but your relationship to Him ...

... which is what repentance is (as we talked about last week).

It is not fear that drives us to God. It's His undeserved and unearned kindness – His grace.

So ...

1. If you are hearing my voice today, that is God giving you a glimpse of a better way and inviting you to learn more.
2. Even though your life demonstrates that you are not deserving of that, God accepts

you without demanding that you first change.

3. Finally, God loves you so much that he was willing to sacrifice so you could live that “better way.”

That’s why the Son of God left the comfort and glory of Heaven and came to earth as a baby born in Bethlehem on that first Christmas.

That’s why he grew up and taught the Way of God’s Kingdom, giving us a glimpse of the kind of life we could have.

And that’s why He gave his life on the cross to atone for our sin so we could be forgiven and set free from the chains of the old life and enter into the new one.

Now, here’s what’s amazing about all of this:

- We all long for there to be a better way
- We all long for grace that accepts us as we are and not as we should be (because we're never going to be as we should be).
- We all long for a love that would sacrifice so that we could live that better way.

That's why Hollywood keeps making sappy movies like *The Family Man* and we keep watching them.

But the amazing part is that we long for those things and they really do exist!

They come from God. And God wants us to have to them.

God wants *you* to have them.

All In

But at some point, you have to go after them.
You have to go all in.

See, Jack *learned* enough that he *wanted* a better life and he *received* enough that he was *able* to have it.

But to actually *have* it, he had to give up Wall Street and go after Kate, even to the point of making a fool of himself.

He's a perfect example of what Jesus was talking about when he said ...

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found [the treasure] ...

When Jack discovered that the life *he could have had* was better than the one *he did have* ...

"When a man found the treasure, he hid it again ...

“... and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.” Matthew 13:44 (NIV)

He went all in.

Friends ...

- God is giving you a glimpse of the life you could have
- He accepts you as you are
- And His love for you is sacrificial

Everything you long for and everything you need.

At some point you have to go all in. You have to begin following Jesus or following Him more closely.

And when you follow Jesus, it's not a quick fix. It's a long journey – a long obedience in the same direction.

But it's worth it.

In fact, we have a song we sometimes sing about what it's like when you go all in with Jesus.

I've asked the band to lead us in singing it together so let's stand together and do that.

Two things to let you know about before we leave ...

Next week ...

- The Santa Clause
- Invite a friend

Christmas Eve services 3:00/4:30

- About an hour
- Candlelight, music, creative presentation of the story, short message
- Livestream & masked seating section
- Childcare to PreK

Endnotes

ⁱ Actually, the Apostle Paul said this not Jesus but it's obviously in keeping with Jesus' teaching.