

Christmas/New Year's Weekend

Groundhog Day

December 29, 2019

Video Clip – 00 Intro (.8 min)

This is just music, clouds and credits (enough for me to get on stage and setup)

Good morning everyone. Thanks for joining us on campus or watching online.

This is kind of an in-between-Sunday for us being that we're in between series, having finished *Christmas at the Movies* last week and about to begin a new series, *Resolution Solution*, next week.

(There's information in your program on that so I hope you'll be part of that, as well as inviting someone who isn't a church attender to come and join you).

But, for today, we're going take a look at one of my all-time favorite movies, *Groundhog Day*, which stars Bill Murray and Andie McDowell and was produced all the way back in 1993.

Has anybody here *not* seen this movie? You are truly a unique person.

Now, when I saw this movie for the first time (and then again for the umpteenth time) I was blown away at how well it illustrates the answer to a very important question about what it means to be a Christian.

By the way, if you're a guest with us, I should probably let you know that we don't talk about movies every Sunday. But, from time-to-time, we'll take a movie or several movies and use them to illustrate spiritual truth in a new way – sort of like what Jesus would do when He would take things that people were already familiar with and use them as spiritual object lessons.

Anyway ... *Groundhog Day* illustrates the answer to a very important question about what it means to be a Christian ...

And by the way, I realize that not everyone here or watching is a Christian and that's OK. We're glad you're with us. And I'm glad you're getting to hear this message because I think it will help you understand some things as much as it will those of us who *are* Christians.

Anyway ... here's the question:

- Given that people are sinners in need of a savior ...
- And given that God provides a savior in his Son, Jesus of Nazareth ...

- And given that people need to accept this free gift of forgiveness of sin and eternal life ...
- And given that some do ...

What's next?

I mean, is this all there is to Christianity – “you need to be saved from sin, so accept Jesus as your savior and then go on about your business? See ya in heaven?”

Or, is there a plan in the here and now for people who receive Christ?

Theological Foundations

Well, even a cursory reading of the New Testament tells us that just “accepting Jesus” is not all there is. God does have a plan for those who come to Jesus and it’s quite incredible.

And we’ll get to how the movie illustrates it but, first, I want to take a six or seven minutes to explain the theological foundation for this because it is so important that every Christian understand it.

If you don’t get this nailed down in your heart and mind ...

- You will never have clarity about what God is trying to do in your life.
- You’ll be confused, distressed, discouraged
- And you will miss out on the joy of experiencing God in your everyday life.

And I want better than that for you. God wants better for you.

So here it is. The Apostle Paul is writing to some first century believers in and followers of Jesus ...

... and he says:

It is because of him [God] that you are in Christ Jesus ...

It all began with the Father, Paul is saying. He sent his Son and now, because of your faith in Him, you are “in Jesus” ...
Jesus ...

... who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 1 Corinthians 1:31 (NIV)

Jesus, Paul is saying, has become our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

That's it. That's the plan. That's what you've got to know if you're going to make it as a Christian.

So, what does it mean?

Let's break it down word by word.

1. "Righteousness" means that God now considers us to be sinless like Jesus.

Somehow, in a way I don't fully understand, on the cross, Jesus took our all of our sin into Himself and, in exchange, gave us His righteousness.

If we've accepted Christ, it's as if we've never sinned ... which is completely amazing isn't it?

That's why Paul writes ...

So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. For the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you through Christ Jesus from the power of sin that leads to death. Romans 8:1-2 (NLT)

Practically speaking, if you died tonight, and you have put your faith in Jesus and what He did, because He is your righteousness, there would be no condemnation and no judgment for anything you have done. Jesus has already borne that on your behalf on the cross.

But, as we've said, there's more to Christianity than this and Paul tells us what it is. He said that Jesus, in addition to being our righteousness, is also our *holiness*.

What does *that* mean?

Well, "holiness" is a word that is used to describe character.

And in this case ...

2. "Holiness" means that we are becoming more like Jesus in our attitudes and actions.

It means that we live like Jesus would if He were here in our place. It means that we think and do what He would think and do if He were in our place.

And if that's hard to visualize, maybe ask yourself ...

- If Jesus was parenting my children instead of me, what would that look like?
- If Jesus was married to my spouse instead of me, what would that look like?
- If Jesus worked where I do, what kind of employee would He be?

Get the picture? That's what holiness looks like.

So, being a Christian ... being "in Christ" ... belonging to Jesus ... means righteousness, holiness *and* ... redemption.

Well, what does that mean?

3. "Redemption" means all the bad that happens to us will ultimately be used for our good.

All the bad that happens to us, whether it's because of ...

- Dumb and sinful things we do
- Or dumb and sinful things others do
- Or just because we're in the wrong place at the wrong time ...

... all the bad that happens to us will ultimately be used for our good.

And we can believe that because we've already witnessed the greatest redemption ever – the ultimate good coming from the ultimate bad – in Jesus himself. He was crucified but the Father raised him from the dead and gave him a new kind of body that will never die.

And he promises to do the same for us when Jesus returns.

Righteousness, holiness and redemption: if you're a Christian, this is what Jesus means to your life. It's what God is trying to do in your life.

And if you don't understand that and cooperate with it, you're going to unhappy and unfulfilled as a Christian.

Oh, one other observation that's kind of important:

Righteousness happens in an instant. Holiness and redemption take a lifetime.

When you come to that point in your life where you put your faith in Christ as your savior and leader, God declares you righteous. It's a done deal and it never changes.

- You don't have to be re-forgiven.
- You don't have to re-accept Jesus for sins you committed after you accepted Him the first time.

If you sincerely put your faith in Christ, you are forgiven, once and for all, of *all* your sin: past, present and

future.

But *holiness* – becoming like Jesus in your character ...

And *redemption* – seeing good come from all the bad you experience ...

Those are things that God brings about over time.

Paul says:

I am sure that God, who began the good work within you ...

[he's talking about the work of making you righteous]

...will continue his work ...

[referring to holiness and redemption]

*... until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again.
Philippians 1:6 (NLT)*

Righteousness happens in an instant. But holiness and redemption require a process of transformation in order for Jesus to be formed in us, a process sometimes known as "Christian Formation."

And *that* won't be finished until Jesus comes back again or we see Him in Heaven ... which means that it takes a lot of time.

Basic Storyline

... which brings us to *Groundhog Day*: a story about a man who has a *lot* of time and during that time goes through a process of transformation.

Phil Connors is a TV weatherman in Pittsburgh, PA who has been assigned to do a live remote from the annual Groundhog Day festivities in Puxatawney, PA. But Phil is not happy about this.

Actually, Phil is not happy about anything. He is rude, crude and self-centered which is obvious from the opening scene.

Check out his attitude when he wakes up at a local Bed and Breakfast on the morning of the big day.

Video Clip –

(Begin) Radio announcer: "That's right woodchuck chuckers ..."

(End) Phil: "Chance of departure today 100%"

Much to Phil's surprise and dismay, he and his crew are unable to make it back to Pittsburgh because the

blizzard that was supposed to pass to the south ... doesn't. He's stuck in Puxatawney.

And when he wakes up on what he believes is the *next* morning, he discovers that, somehow, it's still Feb 2nd.

Check out how *this* particular Groundhog Day begins.

Video Clip

(Begin) Phil turns from window

(End) Phil: "Chance of departure ... 75-80"

So, Phil is a jerk. But he's not going to stay that way because he's entered a process that's going to change him over a very long period of time – and in a very unusual way:

Phil is going to get to live the same day over and over again (12,395 times some have calculated)ⁱ until his character is completely transformed and he experiences redemption.

Of course, Phil doesn't realize that's the purpose of getting to re-live the same day so, at first, he sees himself as the victim of a cruel joke some unknown force is playing on him.

But soon it dawns on him that living the same day over means he can do whatever he wants without suffering the consequences ... because the next morning everything resets to exactly what it was!

And it also means he can learn enough about the people of the town and about his crew to manipulate them, so he does that, too. He goes into each day armed with the knowledge gained from the previous iteration of Groundhog Day and he uses that knowledge in an attempt to take advantage of people ...

... especially Rita, his producer.

He spends day after repeated day with her, learning more about her so he can charm her and have his way with her.

And just when it looks like he might be successful ... well, let's watch.

Video Clip

(Begin) Phil: "I've got a perfect fire."

(End) Fades as Rita leaves

Phil's attempt to seduce Rita fails many more times – maybe even hundreds of times – until, finally, he becomes extremely depressed and hopeless.

He's completely jaded about everything but *especially* Groundhog Day and the town of Puxatawney, which becomes obvious in how he begins to cover the event.

Check it out.

Video Clip –

(Begin) Phil: "This is pitiful ..."

(End) Phil predicts: "... last you for the rest of your life."

Phil is so despondent that he actually wants to die, but he discovers that he's unable to kill himself. No matter what he does, he always wakes up at 6am February 2nd to Sonny and Cher singing, "I got you, babe."

But remember, this is a movie about transformation, so Phil doesn't *stay* this way. Something remarkable happens to him and, by the end of the movie, he's a completely different human being ...

... which is illustrated by *this* version of his Groundhog Day report.

Let's watch.

Video Clip –

(Begin) Phil: "When Chekov saw the long winter ..."

(End) Larry: "Thank you"

So, what happened to Phil?

And, more importantly, how does it help us as Christians understand the process which God uses to transform our character and redeem us?

Let's dig a little deeper into the story.

Principles of Christian Formation

Once Phil realizes that he's never going to be able to manipulate Rita, he begins to build a real friendship with her – as much as you can build in one day – and she actually believes what he tells her about reliving the same day over and over again.

In this next scene, listen closely to her observation.

Video Clip –

(Begin) Phil: "Be the hat ..."

(End) Phil: "Gosh, you're an upbeat lady."

"Maybe it's not a curse, Phil. Maybe there is some value to everything that's happening to you."

And that illustrates the first principle of Christian formation, which is, if you're a Christian ...

1. God uses *everything* in your life to accomplish His purpose.

Everything – even things that seem like a curse – gets used by God. Nothing is wasted. It's all redeemed.

Whether you're ...

- Married or single
- With children or childless
- Employed or unemployed
- Surrounded by friends or surrounded by enemies
- In wealth or in poverty
- In sickness or in health ...

... every situation (good or bad), every individual (good or bad), becomes a tool in the hands of Almighty God
...

... which is why Paul writes ...

God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son ... Romans 8:28-29 (NASB-U)

It's predestined in your life, if you're a Christian, that *all things will* work together for the best thing that could ever happen to you – conforming you to the image of Jesus, seeing His life formed in yours.

By the way, notice that Paul doesn't say "all things are good" or that "all things work together to produce a good circumstance." He says "all things work to produce good *in us and for us.*"

As I said earlier, if you're ever going to get in step with what God is doing in your life, you've got to understand this principle and let it shape your attitude towards God and your life.

And that's what happens to Phil in the movie.

He takes what Rita says to heart and the very next day – which is February 2nd again – he adopts a completely different approach to his life. Instead of taking advantage of others, he decides that he's going to make something out of himself.

Let's watch.

Video Clip –

(Begin) Phil at café listening to music

(End) Phil: "My dad was a piano mover. So ..."

This scene repeats itself again and again. Phil goes through probably hundreds of lessons until something amazing happens later that evening at the annual Groundhog Day Banquet.

Check it out.

Video Clip –

(Begin) Larry: “We were just going to go to the party.”

(End) Phil takes off glasses

<SLIDE SET 3>

And this illustrates the second principle of spiritual transformation. *It doesn't just happen.* There's not a magic pill you can take.

It takes *time* and ...

2. It takes *training* to become like Jesus, not just *trying*.

A lot of Christians know that God wants to form Jesus in them, so they try really hard.

- Try to control their thoughts and words.
- Try to do the right things.
- Try to avoid the wrong things.
- Try to love better
- Try to <fill in the blank>

But it just doesn't work that way anymore than “just trying” to run a marathon would ever work. It takes months and months of training to get in shape for that.

It works the same way in becoming “holy” – or more like Jesus ...

... which is why Paul once told one of his mentees ...

Spend your time and energy in training yourself for spiritual fitness. 1 Timothy 4:8
(NLT)

Christian formation takes study. It takes learning from mentors. It takes spiritual disciplines of prayer and fasting and confession and church attendance and meditation and solitude.

And it takes a lot of time doing these things over and over until the “old us” gets broken away and the “new us” – the one that looks like Jesus – comes shining through.

Which leads to the next principle of Christian formation.

3. God usually has to break us of self-dependence so that we'll trust Him and His way.

Even though we have come to Christ, we still have the old habits and patterns of trying to be in control of everything. But, we'll never be transformed as long as that is true, so, sometimes God arranges circumstances in our lives to prove that we aren't in control.

The Apostle Paul talks about this in a letter he wrote to one of the churches he started. He was telling them about a really bad situation he had just gone through ...

... and he wrote:

We were crushed and completely overwhelmed, and we thought we would never live through it. In fact, we expected to die.

*But as a result, we learned not to rely on ourselves, but on God who can raise the dead.
2 Corinthians 1:8-9 (NLT)*

Sometimes God has to allow us to be crushed and completely overwhelmed so that we won't rely on our own wisdom and knowledge and power and strength, but on His.

There's a vivid illustration of this in the movie. As Phil's transformation progresses, one day he befriends a homeless beggar who greets him every morning.

Unfortunately, the man is very old and isn't doing very well, so Phil takes him to the hospital. But to no avail.

Let's watch.

Video Clip –

(Begin) Phil rips curtain open

(End) Phil looks up to heaven

Phil tries hard but he fails again and again to save the old man.

And I wonder if some of us right now are going through situations that look similar to that. We're giving it our best effort but it's not working.

Could it be that God is trying to get our attention and say, "quit trying to control everything. Quit trying to play God. Trust Me and obey Me and I will do what is best for you.

"I have a plan for you. I want to make something so amazing out of you that you won't even recognize yourself when I am done."

... which is what happens to Phil.

After many, many days of approaching Groundhog Day with a new attitude, he's no longer the self-centered, egotistical man he once was.

Check out what he does each day in between news reports and piano lessons.

Video Clip –

(Begin) Phil runs catches kid falling

(End) Phil lights cigarette

<SLIDE SET 4>

Instead of using his knowledge to take advantage of the people around him, Phil literally takes on the role of a servant.

And that illustrates the next principle of Christian Formation:

4. Serving others allows us to experience Jesus living through us.

After all, servanthood was probably the most notable and significant quality of Jesus ...

... which is why Paul writes...

Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God ... made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant ... Philippians 2:4-7 (NIV)

He gave up his rights and privileges as God to become one who serves God and others. And when we do that, we begin to experience Jesus living through us.

Now, what that looks like is different for different people.

- For some people it's a spiritual thing, like regularly praying for others
- For some it's just doing whatever is necessary in the moment
- For some people it's being financially generous
- For some it's being a listening ear and an encouragement
- For some it's sharing wisdom and pushing others to be the best they can be.

Whatever it looks like, being a servant is a key part of "holiness" – becoming like Jesus.

OK, one more Christian Formation principle that's illustrated in this movie.

In this next scene, Phil has just finished his "mini-concert" at the Groundhog Day banquet. As we watch, remember that this is a guy who *despised* the town of Puxatawney and couldn't wait to get out of it. "Chance of departure 100%."

Here we go.

Video Clip –

(Begin) Dancing then woman: "That nice young man from the motor club"

(End) Phil: "Sorry to hear that Felix"

Phil is connected to these people and they are connected to him, which illustrates the final principle (at least that we're talking about today), which is ...

5. We can't do it alone – we need to engage in "community" with other believers.

Spiritual transformation – Christian formation – while it requires personal discipline and training, is not an exercise in individualism.

It takes other Christians involved in our lives as mentors, friends, teachers, encouragers, challengers, rebukers – you name it – if we're going to become like Jesus in our character, if we're going to go from wasting our lives in the pursuit of sin and self to investing them in God's purposes and plans.

And that's the goal. That's what God is trying to do in your life if you have accepted Jesus as your savior.

So, question: if you're a Christian, how many of these principles are at work in your life right now?

- Do you have the attitude that everything – even the bad stuff – is being used by God for your ultimate good?
- Are you involved in training to be like Jesus or are you just trying?
- Are you being broken in some way of self-dependence through which God is saying to you, "trust Me – do it my way?"
- Are you finding places to serve instead of being served?

- Do you have a circle of friends who are helping you to become more like Jesus?

Finally Finished

Now, there's one more scene in this movie that I just love, and it illustrates the greatest thing about holiness and redemption which is *that one day it's going to be complete*.

One day, if you are a believer in Jesus, you will be like him. God Himself will see to it.

Again, Paul writes:

May the God of peace make you holy in every way ...

There's "holiness" – becoming like Jesus ...

... and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until that day when our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.

... which is the ultimate redemption.

And here's the most encouraging part:

God, who calls you, is faithful; he will do this. 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 (NLT)

One day, Jesus is coming back for those who have received him. One day, those who have trusted Him will be with Him, and the process will be complete ...

... which is what happens to Phil.

In what turns out to be the final day of his time-warp, he's again at the banquet where they have a custom of auctioning off the eligible bachelors for charity.

Watch what happens to him.

Video Clip

(Begin) Woman: "Phil, what are you doing down here?"

(End) Rita takes Phil's hand

Again, I just love that scene because Rita is willing to give up everything she has (at least, everything in her checkbook at that moment) to "buy" Phil.

And, of course, as you know if you've seen the movie, time starts moving again for Phil and, on February 3rd, they begin a new life together.

And that scene reminds me of the day that's coming when our Heavenly Father is going to look at those who

have trusted in Jesus and reach out his hand to us and to say not just “you’re done” but “you were worth it. You are precious to me. I gave everything I had and you were worth it. Come into my presence and experience my joy.”

Let’s pray.

<PRAYER>

CLOSING COMMENTS (1)

1. Blessing
2. Promo new series

Marketing bags (new series card, info on Next Gen, popcorn, cocoa and pens) in the vestibule. Those would be for folks to take who want to invite someone to NHCC.

Endnotes

ⁱ <https://www.bigpurplemarble.com/fun-facts-about-bill-murray-and-groundhog-day/>