

A Christmas Carol Pt. 1

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, December 6, 2020

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us today! Whether you are here in person or watching via the livestream, you are most welcome. As we dismiss the children at this time (i.e., Children’s Church and/or Nursery), allow me to make a few brief announcements.

NOTE 1 – The 2020 Annual Business Meeting will take place on Sunday, January 24, 2021 following the Sunday Service (January 31 in case of inclement weather). Nomination forms necessary to nominate individuals for the elected offices of Deacon and Trustee on our church Board—whose terms expire at the Annual Meeting—will be distributed today after service. The completed forms must be placed in the designated box located on the table in the front foyer by no later than Sunday, December 20, 2020. Also, the deadline for the submission of Ministry Leader Reports is Sunday, January 3, 2021.

NOTE 2 – Moreover, I am pleased to note that today is “New Member Sunday.” At varying intervals throughout the year, we welcome new members into this local assembly. We hold membership to be a sacred privilege and responsibility here at New Life, as it promotes the welfare of the believer, enhances the ministry of this corporate body, and c) advances the kingdom of Christ in the earth.

NOTE 3 – Thus said, it is my joy to welcome both Marty Lee and Conlan Barry at this time, having successfully completed our membership process and upon the unanimous consent of our Board. New Life, would you please welcome these men with a round of applause!

NOTE 4 – Marty and Conlan, may God bless you and make you a blessing to this church, this community and to Christ Jesus (i.e., in ever-increasing degrees). May you fulfill His unique calling on your lives as committed and connected members of this church body. May the Lord grant us many years of enriching, effective and impacting service—i.e., as we do the work of the Lord—together. Thank you for your willingness to pursue membership. Welcome!

KEY 1 – Church, please give them one more round of applause!

KEY 2 – As we transition to the morning message, have a Bible at the ready and be ready to take copious notes...

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 1

The Christmas season is upon us! In fact, we are just weeks away from the holiday itself, wherein we celebrate the Advent and Birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In many ways, this truly is “the most wonderful time of the year”—though I could certainly do without the snow to be perfectly honest...

KEY – I could not, however, do without the great movies that accompany the Christmas holiday. Let’s be honest...

Q. How many in the sound of my voice have a “favorite” Christmas movie?

On the count of three everyone here and at home shout out your favorite Christmas movie! 1...2...3...GO!

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 2

FYI 1 – I did a bit of research in recent days, and the following are considered some of the most beloved holiday classics. In fact, I would like for you all (i.e., both here and at home) to raise a hand each time you hear the title of a holiday movie you have seen...

Q. How many in the sound of my voice have seen? ...

- 1) Elf
- 2) Die Hard
- 3) Home Alone
- 4) The Santa Clause
- 5) How the Grinch Stole Christmas
- 6) Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer
- 7) A Charlie Brown Christmas
- 8) Miracle on 34th Street
- 9) Christmas Vacation
- 10) A Christmas Story
- 11) White Christmas
- 12) It's a Wonderful Life

FYI 2 – Remember this is a non-exhaustive list. Thus, it is possible that your holiday favorite was not mentioned...

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 3

KEY – In fact, my favorite holiday movie was not mentioned (albeit deliberately)! Of all the Christmas stories in all the world that appear throughout the holiday season, my personal favorite is “A Christmas Carol.” In fact, each year I happily watch as many adaptations of this beloved tale as possible (and there are many), as no other tale speaks to or moves my heart as does this Dickens classic.

Q. How many have watched any version of Dickens’s “A Christmas Carol”?

Q. How many have read the short story penned by Charles Dickens (1843)?

FYI – For those who may not know, “A Christmas Carol” recounts the “story of Ebenezer Scrooge, an elderly miser who is visited by the ghost of his former business partner Jacob Marley and the spirits of Christmas Past, Present and Yet to Come. After their visit, Scrooge is transformed into a kinder, gentler man.”

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 4

NOTE 1 – This Sunday morning and next I want to present a series of quotations and/or excerpts from “A Christmas Carol” that have come to mean something significant to me. i.e., They have been used to inform and impact my Christian experience over the years, as they touch upon timeless biblical truths that have timely application in this season and all the yearlong.

NOTE 2 – Of course, I will operate from the assumption that a great many of you have seen and/or read “A Christmas Carol.” If not, I will do my best to build the necessary bridges for those who have not encountered this classic work. Thus said, let us delve in...

EXCERPT #1 PT. A

The first selection I want to put forth comes from the dialogue between Ebenezer Scrooge and the spirit of his long-deceased business partner, Jacob Marley. Marley, like Scrooge, had recklessly given himself to the accumulation of wealth (i.e., greed) during his lifetime. Now he has come with a message and a warning for his wayward friend, Ebenezer...

NOTE 1 – The scene I have selected includes Scrooge’s description of the ghostly apparition of Jacob Marley...

“Marley [was] in his pigtail, usual waistcoat, tights and boots; the tassels on the latter bristling, like his pigtail, and his coat-skirts, and the hair upon his head. The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long, and wound about him like a tail; and it was made (for Scrooge observed it closely) of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel. His body was transparent; so that Scrooge, observing him, and looking through his waistcoat, could see the two buttons on his coat behind.

NOTE 2 – Scrooge came to tremble at Marley (who noted that chain that Scrooge had and would come to bear)...

“Scrooge trembled more and more.

‘Or would you know,” pursued the Ghost, ‘the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. You have laboured on it, since. It is a ponderous chain!’

Scrooge glanced about him on the floor, in the expectation of finding himself surrounded by some fifty or sixty fathoms of iron cable: but he could see nothing.

‘Jacob,’ he said, imploringly. ‘Old Jacob Marley, tell me more. Speak comfort to me, Jacob!’

‘I have none to give,’ the Ghost replied. ‘It comes from other regions, Ebenezer Scrooge, and is conveyed by other ministers, to other kinds of men. Nor can I tell you what I would. A very little more is all permitted to me. I cannot rest, I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere. My spirit never walked beyond our counting-house—mark me!—in life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole; and weary journeys lie before me!’”

EXCERPT #1 PT. B

Of course, you may be asking...

Q. “Pastor, why are you bringing forth this selection from Dickens’s tale?”

A. Because this scene and the principles therein touch upon biblical truths (2).

1) The Vices We Give Ourselves to Bind Us in This Life

Scrooge did not know it as did Marley, but the sin of greed had already ensnared him. In the story, Scrooge was anything but free, as it drove all of his passions, values, decisions and determinations (i.e., at great personal cost)! This speaks to the nature of sin: it “ensnares, dominates, and holds captive” all who are given to and/or subject to its power...

Q. Don't believe me? Consider the following selections from the Word of God...

Proverbs 5:22 (NIV, Emphasis Mine)

22 The evil deeds of the wicked ensnare them;
the cords of their sins hold them fast.

John 8:34 (Emphasis Mine)

34 Jesus [proclaimed], "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a **slave** to sin."

QUOTE – "Just as surely as a person on drugs eventually wants to take the drug because he is enslaved by it, sin has an addictive quality. Satan knows very well that if he can get us to sin once, there is a strong possibility he can get us to sin again and again and again until we are eventually enslaved by it and cannot help ourselves."

Q. I wonder how many of us carry the chains of vice (i.e., unseen and unrecognized)?

Q. Will you confess your sins and allow the Christ to liberate you for time and eternity?

2) The Vices We Give Ourselves to Will Be Met with Penalty Divine

Marley was forced to carry a chain of his own making for all of eternity. Scrooge himself was well on his way to such a fate! Of course, the penalty we face will look different (i.e., from a biblical perspective), but the idea of eternal penalty for unpardoned sin is as real as the promise of reward for those who are His! Christ taught that many...

Matthew 25:26b (Emphasis Mine)

46 "... will go away to **eternal punishment**, but the righteous to **eternal life**."

Galatians 6:7–8

7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Romans 2:5b–9a

5 . . . because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. 6 God "will repay each person according to what they have done." 7 To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. 8 But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. 9 There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil . . .

FYI – I would posit that the eternal fate of the unrighteous is far worse than what Marley would have to bear...

Luke 16:19–31

19 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

22 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

25 “But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’

27 “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’

29 “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’

30 “‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

31 “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

KEY – Let us heed Jacob Marley’s warning—and more importantly that of Scripture—and realize the peril of sin!

EXCERPT #2 PT. A

The second selection that I want to consider this morning also comes from the dialogue between Scrooge and the ghost of Jacob Marley. Scrooge, overwhelmed with terror at the message of his deceased peer, simultaneously wonders why Jacob is so forced to suffer for eternity. How could such a thing be?

NOTE 1 – In the estimation of Scrooge, Marley was a fine man. Dickens records Scrooge as saying the following...

“But you were always a good man of business, Jacob,” faltered Scrooge . . .

NOTE 2 – Yet Marley works to correct the record, noting what the “business” of his life should have been. Note...

‘Business!’ cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. ‘Mankind was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. The deals of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!’”

KEY – I believe that these sentiments touch upon critical biblical truths...

EXCERPT #2 PT. B

Q. What is to be the “business” of our lives? i.e., Why are we here?

NOTE 1 – The wise of this world might respond by telling you that your purpose (i.e., the business of life) is to amass a sizeable bank account, accumulate wealth, pursue a prodigious education, increase the scope of your influence, pursue pleasure, consolidate and wield power, etc. Sadly, a great many believers have come to believe this message (though they might never admit it)...

Q. I wonder how many Christians would be better off if they kept the following text in mind?

2 Timothy 3:6b–10

6 . . . godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. 8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9 Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

NOTE 2 – Though such things may be fine in their place (e.g., money, prestige, power, influence, etc.), our highest, loftiest and primary calling (i.e., “business”) has to do with more moral, spiritual and eternal matters. As Marley noted, “Mankind was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. The deals of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!”

Q. What does this mean? What is Marley saying?

A. The “business” of life is tethered to the practice of love.

KEY – This sounds quite a bit like what Christ espoused in His teaching...

Matthew 22:35–40

35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

37 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Q. Why are we here? What are we to “give ourselves to”?

EXCERPT #2 PT. C

A1) We Are to Love God

Q. How much? How much are we to love Him?

A. Consider the words of Christ who noted the following...

Matthew 22:37b (Emphasis Mine)

37 “... Love the Lord your God with **all** your heart and with **all** your soul and with **all** your mind.”

FYI – This same Christ taught the following...

Luke 14:26

26 “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.”

Luke 14:26 (PJV)

“If anyone loves their father, mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, any facet of their lives—and even their own life—more than they love me, such a person cannot be my disciple.”

Q. Is this what you are actively pursuing (above all else)?

A2) We Are to Love Others

Q. How much? How much are we to love others?

A. To the degree that we love and/or care for ourselves!

Matthew 22:37b–39 (NIV, Emphasis Mine)

37 “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor **as yourself**.’”

Christ herein turns the worst aspect of our fallen human condition (i.e., our self-centered nature) into the metric we are to use in loving others. Love others to the degree you want to be loved! Show others the patience, kindness, humility, honor, mercy, pardon, protection, trust and unwavering support that you want and would want to receive at all times (cf. 1 Cor. 13:4–7). Show love...

NOTE 1 – Particularly those who are most vulnerable and in need...

James 1:27 (Emphasis Mine)

27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after **orphans** and **widows** in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

NOTE 2 – Particularly those who are the most unworthy...

Luke 6:27–36

27 “But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

32 “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Q. And if we refuse to show such love to the unworthy, etc.?

1 John 4:7–8, 20

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. . . . 20 Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.

KEY – Christian...

Let us heed Marley’s word—and that of Scripture—and give ourselves to the business of loving God and others!

SUMMATIONS

NOTE 1 – Much more could be said this morning on each of these points...

NOTE 2 – Much more will be said next Sunday as we continue in this study...

KEY – In the meantime, however, consider the following this Christmas season...

- 1) The Vices We Give Ourselves to Bind Us in This Life
- 2) The Vices We Give Ourselves to Will Be Met w/ Penalty Divine
- 3) Our Primary Calling and Mission is to Love the Lord w/ Our Whole Being
- 4) Our Secondary Calling and Mission is to Love Others as Ourselves

CONCLUSION PT. 1

Thank you for taking the time to join us today. Should those of you who have joined us online wish to give, please do so through the giving portal of our church website (www.NewLifeBarre.org). For those who are present, you may place your donation in one of our offering boxes.

CONCLUSION PT. 2

FYI – Allow me to close with the following (albeit an unusual way to close). From time to time a need from one of our missionaries comes to my attention. It has recently come to my attention that Justin and Janet Henry (Bolivia) have come upon some difficult times in light of COVID-19. Specifically, a portion of their revenue stream has dried up as teams from the United States are not allowed to travel to the country in which they serve due to the pandemic...

Q. How many believe that God would have us play a part in helping them in their min. efforts?

Q. Would you pray about sowing into their ministry (i.e., offering a financial contribution)?

Q. Would you commit to praying for Justin, Janet, and their ministry to those in Bolivia?

Q. Could we take a moment to pray for our friends and ministry partners right now?

KEY 1 – Should you wish to give online, please designated your offering to “MISSIONS” and type “Justin Henry” to the comment field. Should you wish to give in person, please make your check payable to New Life Assembly of God and write “MISSIONS – JUSTIN HENRY” in the memo field. Those who give cash must place their offering in an envelope and write “MISSIONS – JUSTIN HENRY” on the outside...

KEY 2 – Whatever comes into this church for the Henry family will be dispersed to them accordingly. Bless you!

Numbers 6:24–26

24 The Lord bless you
and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.