

A Christmas Carol Pt. 2

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, December 13, 2020

INTRODUCTIONS

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 for Children's Church and the 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 advances the kingdom of Christ in the earth.

NOTE 3 – Thus said, it is my joy to welcome both Marty Lee and Conlan Barry as new members. These men have successfully completed our membership process and secured the unanimous consent of our Board. New Life, would you please welcome Marty and Conlan with a round of applause!

NOTE 4 – Marty and Conlan, may the Lord bless you and make you a blessing to this church, to 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 He 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!

NOTE 5 – Church, please give these men one more round of applause!

KEY – As we transition to the message, please have a Bible at the ready and take notes as you deem necessary...

SETTING THE STAGE

Last Sunday morning we considered scenes and selections from Charles Dickens's “A Christmas Carol” (i.e., noting a series of corresponding biblical truths illustrated within). This morning I would like to continue in this study, citing key moments from this beloved holiday classic and addressing scriptural principles in kind. Remember...

KEY 1 – I am not looking to consider the Word of God through the filter of this timeless Christmas tale.

KEY 2 – I am looking to consider this Christmas tale through the filter of the Spirit-inspired Word of God.

Let us delve in...

EXCERPT #1 PT. A

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

Q. How many within the sound of my voice recall this scene from the movie(s) and/or book?

FYI – I will not take the time today to recap the dialogue between these two characters. The whole of last Sunday was dedicated to the words shared between Scrooge and Marley, so please listen to the previous sermon at your convenience. I will note, however, that Marley says something brief but noteworthy in the midst of his remarks. Specifically, he notes that...

“No space of regret can make amends for one life's opportunity misused” (REPEAT).

Q. What does this mean? What is the meaning of this remark?

A. Eternal sorrow cannot and will not atone for misspent life and living.

NOTE – In death, Marley expressed sincere remorse for the manner in which he had lived (i.e., being consumed by greed v. giving himself to the “business” of charity and showing compassion to his fellow man). However, the unceasing remorse he now knew would not change his fate (i.e., the carrying of his chain) or undo what had been done in life. His time had passed and there was simply no going back! He lamented that...

“No space of regret can make amends for one life's opportunity misused.”

KEY – We do well to heed his words as they are in accord with Scripture...

EXCERPT #1 PT. B

1) Scripture Speaks Clearly to the Brevity of Life

James 4:13–14 (NIV, Emphasis Mine)

What is your life? You are a **mist** that appears for a **little while** and then **vanishes**.

Psalms 39:5 (Emphasis Mine)

5 You have made my days a **mere handbreadth**;
the span of my years is as **nothing** before you.
Everyone is but a **breath**,
even those who seem secure.

KEY – You and I have been allotted/afforded but one life—i.e., one limited, finite span of time—to live...

2) Since We Have but One Life to Live – Let Us Live Wisely

KEY – We must maximize the time we have been granted by the Lord (i.e., as there are no do-overs in eternity)!

Psalm 39:4

4 “Show me, Lord, my life’s end
and the number of my days;
let me know how fleeting my life is.

Psalm 90:12

12 Teach us to number our days,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

NOTE 1 – This is how Christ Jesus lived during His time on earth...

John 9:4

4 As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.

NOTE 2 – This is how the apostle Paul taught us to live as followers of Christ...

Ephesians 5:15–16

15 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

3) Eternal Regret Cannot and Will Not Make Amends for a Misspent Life

e.g., 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.’”

Q. Did the ‘rich man’ wish he could go back and live his life differently? YES

Q. Would eternal misery and regret allow him to re-live his life and living? NO

Q. Will unceasing sorrow and anguish change his eternal condition? IN NO WISE

EXCERPT #2 PT. A

The second selection that I want to consider comes from the dialogue between Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Present. If you recall from the movie and/or the book, the Ghost of Christmas Present appears to age more-and-more as his time with Scrooge passed. Noting this, Scrooge asks the following...

"Are spirits' lives so short?" asked Scrooge.

"My life upon this globe, is very brief," replied the Ghost. "It ends to-night."

"To-night!" cried Scrooge.

"To-night at midnight. Hark! The time is drawing near."

The chimes were ringing the three quarters past eleven at that moment.

"Forgive me if I am not justified in what I ask," said Scrooge, looking intently at the Spirit's robe, "but I see something strange, and not belonging to yourself, protruding from your skirts. Is it a foot or a claw?"

"It might be a claw, for the flesh there is upon it," was the Spirit's sorrowful reply. "Look here."

From the foldings of its robe, it brought two children; wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable. They knelt down at its feet, and clung upon the outside of its garment.

"Oh, Man! look here. Look, look, down here!" exclaimed the Ghost.

They were a boy and girl. Yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish; but prostrate, too, in their humility. Where graceful youth should have filled their features out, and touched them with its freshest tints, a stale and shrivelled hand, like that of age, had pinched, and twisted them, and pulled them into shreds. Where angels might have sat enthroned, devils lurked, and glared out menacing. No change, no degradation, no perversion of humanity, in any grade, through all the mysteries of wonderful creation, has monsters half so horrible and dread.

Scrooge started back, appalled. Having them shown to him in this way, he tried to say they were fine children, but the words choked themselves, rather than be parties to a lie of such enormous magnitude.

"Spirit! are they yours?" Scrooge could say no more.

"They are Man's," said the Spirit, looking down upon them. "And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased.

EXCERPT #2 PT. B

Q. What is the meaning of this strange scene or account?

Q. What did these children represent in Dickens's writing?

A. The children represent two tragic elements of the human condition. The girl represents those in "WANT" (i.e., referring to the countless men, women and children who lack the basic necessities of life and living). The boy represents those who turn a blind eye to this reality and practice a spirit of willful "IGNORANCE" (i.e., shielding themselves from the suffering of others and any obligation to relieve that suffering in kind).

NOTE – The spirit particularly warns about the boy (i.e., "IGNORANCE") as he only works to precipitate "DOOM." Those who turn a blind eye to the suffering of others effectively **a)** amplify human suffering, **b)** bring divine penalty upon themselves, and **c)** degrade any "great" nation...

KEY 1 – His remarks emphasize the obligation we have to those in need (i.e., need for charity and compassion)...

KEY 2 – We do well to heed the warning of the Ghost of Christmas Present as his words are born of Scripture...

EXCERPT #2 PT. C

KEY – Scripture speaks of our obligation to those in "WANT" — leaving no room for "IGNORANCE."

1 John 3:17

If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

James 1:27

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.

Matthew 25:31–46

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

41 “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

44 “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

45 “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

46 “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

EXCERPT #3 PT. A

The final selection that I want to consider comes toward the very end of the story. Herein, Scrooge is interacting with the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come (i.e., the most foreboding and ominous of all the spirits). Scrooge finds himself—by the leading of this spirit—in a churchyard littered with gravestones. Consider what Dickens penned nearly two-centuries ago...

The Spirit stood among the graves, and pointed down to One. He advanced towards it trembling. The Phantom was exactly as it had been, but he dreaded that he saw new meaning in its solemn shape.

“Before I draw nearer to that stone to which you point,” said Scrooge, “answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of things that May be, only?”

Still the Ghost pointed downward to the grave by which it stood.

“Men’s courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead,” said Scrooge. “But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me!”

The Spirit was immovable as ever.

Scrooge crept towards it, trembling as he went; and following the finger, read upon the stone of the neglected grave his own name, EBENEZER SCROOGE. . . .

“Spirit!” he cried, tight clutching at its robe, “hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse. Why show me this, if I am past all hope!”

For the first time the hand appeared to shake.

“Good Spirit,” he pursued, as down upon the ground he fell before it: “Your nature intercedes for me, and pities me. Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life!”

The kind hand trembled.

“I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!”

In his agony, he caught the spectral hand. It sought to free itself, but he was strong in his entreaty, and detained it. The Spirit, stronger yet, repulsed him.

Holding up his hands in a last prayer to have his fate reversed, he saw an alteration in the Phantom's hood and dress. It shrunk, collapsed, and dwindled down into a bedpost.

Yes! and the bedpost was his own. The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the Time before him was his own, to make amends in!

FYI – Scrooge thus awoke on Christmas morning a changed man, as the story goes on to beautifully demonstrate!

EXCERPT #3 PT. B

FYI – In this section of the work, Scrooge makes a statement worthy of particular attention...

“Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead,” said Scrooge. “But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me!”

NOTE 1 – Scrooge had come to consider (i.e., in a moment of desperation) that if he heeded the warnings of Marley and the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Yet to Come, perhaps the horrors that he had been exposed might never come to pass! He had come to consider that a change in spiritual direction could lead to very different ends (i.e., and that as long as he drew breath, he had the chance to change and make “amends”)...

NOTE 2 – And you know what? He was right! Consider...

KEY 1 – God is the God of turnarounds and second, third, and fourth chances! He is benevolent and merciful...

1 John 1:9

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Micah 7:18 (NKJV)

“Come now, and let us reason together,”

Says the Lord,

“Though your sins are like scarlet,

They shall be as white as snow;

Though they are red like crimson,

They shall be as wool.

KEY 2 – If we will take Him at His offer of divine mercy, our ultimate destination for time & eternity can change...

John 3:16–17 (NIV)

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Q. Has the time come for you to change your spiritual direction and heed the words and wisdom of the Word?

CONCLUSION PT. 1

Clearly, much can be learned from “A Christmas Carol.” It has become a holiday classic and will remain so long after we are gone because the themes it touches upon are timeless and timely. Of course, all great stories connect back to the Bible, so this tale of Dickens serves to point us to the eternal Word of God. Let us have ears to hear what the Lord is saying in this Christmas Season!

KEY – I close with the conclusion of “A Christmas Carol”...

“Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Tim, who did not die, he was a second father. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world. Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them; for he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset . . . His own heart laughed: and that was quite enough for him.

. . . it was always said of him . . . that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless Us, Every One!”

CONCLUSION PT. 2

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.

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.