

Christmas in the Movies

“A Christmas Carol – Love”

[Luke 2:1-20](#)

This past month, we have been exploring the gospel message found in some of the classic Christmas movies. So far, we have watched the Polar Express, Miracle on 34th Street, Elf, and A Wonderful Life. And tonight, we are going to look for a Christmas message in the 1984 adaptation of Charles Dickens' 1843 novel, A Christmas Carol. This novel is one of the most famous and popular works of the British author. Starting with a 6-minute black and white silent film adaptation in 1901, it has been adapted into numerous movies and musicals.

At the time it was written, there were many poor people in England. Child labor was common, and people with debt were thrown into prison. Dickens was outraged at the conditions in which working class people lived in. Through his novel, he wanted to raise awareness among the upper class people about the serious social issue of poverty in their country, especially in London, and inspire them to be more compassionate and merciful towards the poor.

As we all know, the story is about a character named Ebenezer Scrooge. If you were to refer to someone as a “Scrooge,” everyone would know what you meant. Calling anyone by that name is not a compliment because it is synonymous with being cranky, mean-spirited, and a selfish miser. See how miserly Scrooge is in this clip. Let's take a look. (Show clip #1)

Right after this clip, Scrooge's nephew, Fred, walks in and invites his uncle to a Christmas dinner at his house. Scrooge responds with his famous two-word Christmas greeting, “Bah, Humbug!” And, then, he proceeds to despise Christmas: “...What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, but not an hour richer... If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with ‘Merry Christmas’ on his lips would be boiled in his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart.”

Wow, what a way to decline a Christmas dinner invitation! If I were his nephew, I would just leave him alone and never invite him again. But, that's not what Fred does. The kind-hearted nephew pleads with his uncle again and again. He is determined to come back next Christmas, hoping that one day his uncle will change his mind.

Miraculously, that's what happens to Scrooge. That very night, he is visited by 4 supernatural visitors -- the ghost of his former business partner and three spirits of the past, present and future. While traveling with the ghosts to different places of his past, present and future, Scrooge is exposed to “the light of truth” and gradually experiences a change of heart and a personal transformation.

Scrooge was not born a miser. Actually, when he was young, he was a typical happy boy. But, as he grew older, he became more and more focused on making money. The woman he was engaged to left him because he chose his wealth over her. Eventually, he became a cold-hearted, lonely miser. In Dickens' own

words, “The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shriveled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice,”

Scrooge changed over time, but, unfortunately, it was not a positive change. It did not make him happier. Instead, the change led him to drift away far from the person God created him to be. He became cynical and miserable, a person who took his misery and anger out on other people. While he was able to grow his fortune as a miserly money-lender and a ruthless businessman at a local counting house, he paid a heavy price. Scrooge not only drifted away from God, but he also pushed everyone away from him, even his only relative, Fred.

Like Scrooge, we all change over time. People of faith are called to become mature as we grow older. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to change by growing into his likeness over time. But, emotional and spiritual maturity does not happen naturally as we age. Sometimes, we find ourselves less patient, less kind, less gentle, less loving, less compassionate, less merciful, less generous, and less joyful, instead of growing more in these attributes. We can stray away from the path God wants us to be on.

But, just like his nephew, Fred and his employee, Cratchit, who never give up on Scrooge no matter how much he pushes them away, God will never give up on Scrooge. No matter how terrible a person he has become, he is never beyond a point of redemption. On Christmas Eve, Scrooge is given an opportunity to start his life over again, to turn around from the path he has created for himself and begin to walk the path God has laid out for him. God’s messengers help him to honestly see himself in the mirror. Through their help, Scrooge is able to repent of his sins and restore his true identity as a child of God. He is able to reclaim the happiness and joy that he once had in his life.

The Spirit of the Past shows Scrooge what he has lost -- the happiness of his childhood, the woman he loved and the marriage and children he could have had. The Spirit of Christmas Present shows him the joy and wonder of Christmas through two visits they make. At his employee, Bob Cratchit’s home, Scrooge is surprised to see how content and happy his employee's family is even though they don’t have much. At his nephew, Fred’s home, he witnesses the Christmas dinner party he declined to join. Everyone is happy and enjoying the food and fellowship. Fred can’t help but think of his uncle who is missing from the joyful gathering. Let’s take a look. (Show clip #2)

Now, the last spirit, the Spirit of the Future -- Christmas Yet to Come -- shows up and takes Scrooge to different places. They go to Bob Cratchit’s house and learn that his little son, Tim, who was sick has died. Then, he suddenly sees some businessmen in suits. They are talking about someone else who has just died. They say he really never loved anyone and they wonder who would be getting all his gold as he is no longer here. As he listens to their conversation, Scrooge realizes that they are talking about him!

Soon, the Spirit takes him to a cemetery and there, he sees his own tombstone. When did he die? On Christmas Day! It means he is about to die! Totally shocked, he cries out, “Spirit, hear me. I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been. Assure me, Spirit that I may yet to change the shadows that you have shown me, by an altered life. I will honor Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year.” Scrooge repents, and his repentance is sincere. He says he has already changed. And, he promises that he will never go back to his past life, a life he has already left behind.

When he wakes up the next morning on Christmas Day, he realizes that he has not died. Instantly, his heart is filled with great joy, and he can hardly contain himself. Probably, for the first time in many decades, he laughs and dances. Let's take a look. (Show clip #3)

Scrooge is now a changed man! As he cried out at the cemetery, he is no longer the man he once was. He now even sings! Dickens writes,

He dressed himself all in his best and at last got out into the streets. The people were by this time pouring forth, as he had seen them with the Ghost of Christmas Present; and walking with his hands behind him, Scrooge regarded everyone with a delighted smile. He looked so irresistibly pleasant, in a word, that three or four good-humored fellows said, "Good morning, sir. A Merry Christmas to you." And, Scrooge said often afterwards, that of all the blithe sounds he had heard, those were the blithest in his ears.

There is something interesting about his name. Though he is mostly called by his last name "Scrooge," his given name is Ebenezer. If you are familiar with old hymns, you might remember the name from "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing." Ebenezer appears in the second verse of that hymn -- "Here I raise mine Ebenezer." This song was quite popular in Dickens' time. Eben is a stone, and Ezer is a deliverer or a helper. So, the name Ebenezer means "a stone of help." Where did it come from? It's from 1 Samuel 7:12. After the Israelites were delivered from the Philistines through the power of God, they raised a monument and called it Ebenezer, so they could remember the mighty work of God. Ebenezer was a symbol of God's power and help, a sign of God's deliverance. On the day of Christmas, Ebenezer Scrooge became the person God created him to be, free from his misery and anger, free from his greed, free from the fear of death. Indeed, he lived into his identity as Ebenezer, a symbol of God's deliverance for all to see with a new identity and new life!

Friends, this is what Christmas is all about. In Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate, we find this gift of love which has the power to deliver and save us. You do not have to work hard to earn it but just open your heart and receive it. May this be yours tonight! May your heart be full of joy, so you will leave this place, smiling, laughing, singing, and dancing, proclaiming to the world, "Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior is born today! Hallelujah, Amen!"