

the Holy Spirit. So it was with the last or Ebenezer's hard-heartedness that melted before the shadowy Ghost of Christmas yet to come. Falling at his feet, and clutching his robes, Scrooge cried out his vow: "*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!*" // ...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.

–[An old saying in Dickens' day was "*The proof of the pudding is in the eating.*" It means that the real value of something can be judged only from practical experience or results, not from *appearance or theory*.] If **tomorrow's destiny is to be influenced by today's decisions**, it means that *transformed choices must translate into authentically transformed behavior*, not just in the fictional story of Scrooge, but in the familiar story of you and me.

Hebrews 10:23-29 (NIV)

23 Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. 26 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, 27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. 28 Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

58-10-06-The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come
Advent, Christmas, future, choice, repentance, death
Hebrew 10:23-29

Tomorrow's destiny is influenced by today's decisions.

INTRODUCTION:

–It's *logical* that **HOM.idea**. But *divine logic* lets the *future help us make wise present choices*. We see this in the 1st part of the **text** today– Heb 10:23-25, *Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.* (In other words, *anticipating Christ's return motivates us to encourage each other in a lifestyle of "love and good deeds."*)

–But *encouragement can be ignored*—the message of "peace on earth, goodwill to men" from Bethlehem's Babe can go *unheeded*. Then the *future is not hopeful*, but *fearful*, as is the 2nd part of this **text**– Heb 10:26-29, *If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?*

–This is why Ebenezer Scrooge trembled at the dark, solemn figure of the 3rd ghost... "*Ghost of the Future!*" he exclaimed, "*I fear you more than any spectre I have seen. But as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart.*" The phantom never spoke, but *only pointed...* and his points became my sermon points. *The 1st was...*

I. Fame and Fortune Are Ultimately Pointless

A. Scrooge was led to overhear some businessmen he knew talking about a person who had just died, who wouldn't be mourned or missed, and how *business as usual* would go on without him.

1. Life holds no guarantee of business as usual– James 4:13-14, Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

2. Neither *fame* nor *fortune* endures (a point that grieved Solomon—Ecc 2:16,18-19, ...the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered; in days to come both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die!... I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless.

B. Scrooge saw this fulfilled as goods and clothing were stolen from the dead man and sold in a slum—Mat 6:19-20, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”)

TRANS: Scrooge had neglected his future destiny by a lifestyle of “*getting all you can, and canning all you get!*” Now he saw the futility of such worldly wisdom, and *in pity* for the poor, unmourned rich man, he cried to the ghost, “*If there is any person in the town, who feels emotion caused by this man’s death, show that person to me, Spirit, I beseech you!*” The ghost extended his finger to make a 2nd point...

II. Those Unmourned in Death Missed their Calling in Life

A. Scrooge was next taken to the home of a poor couple on the brink of financial ruin. They were rejoicing at the news that their cruel and merciless creditor had just died! [In the musical Scrooge, a large crowd of people were *singing in the streets*, rejoicing over this creditor’s death.]

1. [“Good riddance” is an old phrase people often use to signify pleasure at seeing a troublesome person removed from their lives.] To keep that kind of harsh phrase about ourselves out of people’s mouths, we must be sure we make a warm place for ourselves in people’s hearts.
2. How do we do that? [John Wesley offered great advice on how to win the heart of both God and man: “*Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. At all the times you can. To all the people you can. As long as ever you can.*”]

B. In contrast to this future “good riddance” scene, Scrooge was led to the Crachit home where Tiny Tim was being mourned. Bob tells his family, “*I know, my dears, that when we recollect how patient and how mild he was; although he was a little, little child; we shall not quarrel easily among ourselves, and forget poor Tiny Tim in doing it.*” (The wholesome influence of caring souls outlast their death.)

1. At this point, the author Charles Dickens made a personal

comment: “Spirit of Tiny Tim, thy childish essence was from God!” [Some names (like “Scrooge”) bear a universal meaning in the literate world, but the name “Tiny Tim” always reminds us of “*God bless us everyone!*”]

2. In the midst of tearful kisses, Bob Crachit said, “*I am very happy.*” (How can this season be *happy*, when we’ve recently lost loved ones? How can Christmas be *merry* when December marks the anniversary of friends and family being taken from us?)

TRANS: This story and Christmas itself announce a mystical, magical possibility. It’s the opportunity for transformation by Him Who came to turn our “mourning into dancing.” Jesus came to lead us out of being set in sinful ways and into a glorious eternal destiny, if we choose to follow Him.... But to complete the transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come had one last point to make...

III. There is a Point of No Return to Present Opportunities

A. After being shown these circumstances and reactions surrounding this rich man’s wretched death, Scrooge longed to know his name.

1. In a cemetery, the ghost pointed to his own name engraved on a tombstone. Scrooge cried, “*Spirit! hear me! I am not the man I was... Why show me this, if I am past all hope!... Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life!*”
2. Death, the final appointment, ends all others, seals up personal earthly history, shuts the door on all opportunities, brings us before our Maker and our Judge—Heb 9:27. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, [The Scrooge musical surprised me: Ebenezer falls through an open tomb into hell where Marley greets him and leads him to a freezing office where he’s to be Lucifer’s personal slave. His chain is so long and heavy, it takes several men to carry it to him.]

B. But let’s reread Heb 9:27, and this time include the hope found in v.28. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. (The past sacrificial hope of Christ’s 1st Advent and the future redemption promised by His 2nd Advent combine to offer a present transformation that becomes a divine eternal destiny.)

CONCLUSION:

–For sinners to become saints they must succumb to the conviction of