

its whole form; but though Scrooge pressed it down with all his force, he could not hide the light, which streamed from under it, in an unbroken flood upon the ground.”] **Divine light can retrieve us from being sinfully set in our ways**, and we “do well to pay attention to it.” God’s light on our past can begin the healing of our memories. But it often takes more than one or two episodes of His light upon our darkness to bring about a complete transformation. Ebenezer needed more light, not less... and *so do we*.

61-01-03-The Ghost of Christmas Past
Christmas, stinginess, past, regret, healing
2 Peter 1:19

Divine light can retrieve us from being sinfully set in our ways.

INTRODUCTION:

–Just as there’s something deeply *mystical* about the Incarnation—*God becoming human*—so there’s always been something *magical* about Christmas. Writers keep telling Christmas stories, film-makers keep turning them into movies, and people keep reading those stories and keep watching those movies. Why? Because God’s light came at this season. Christmas brought us “the light of the world,” and **HOM.idea**. –2 Peter 1:19, *And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. In this world of trouble, life can seem troublesome; in the midst of hardships, hearts can become hard.* The spirit of Christmas is “a light shining in a dark place” and we “do well to pay attention to it” until a new day dawns upon us and Christ, “the morning star rises in [our] hearts.” Yes, we need those stories...

–A *Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens is one of them. Because of its *mystical and magical* power, we never tire of hearing its tale retold. [To prepare for this sermon series, I watched 8 movie versions of it (the 2 silent films of 1910 and 1922; then 1935, 1951, the 1970 musical, 1986, the 1988 comedy, and the 2009 animated version), and I enjoyed each one.] *So, let’s begin this familiar story again, by looking at...*

I. The Haunts of a Selfish Soul

- A. There’s a difference between *not caring what people think about you* and *not caring about people*; one can be a *virtue*, the other is always a *vice*. But the vice can corrupt the virtue, as it did with Ebenezer Scrooge. He cared not about what people thought, because he did not care about people...
- B. Scrooge demonstrated this lack of care on Christmas Eve, in *how he reacted to those in tune with the Christmas spirit*:
 1. He chases away the young Christmas carolers who are singing on the street for someone to give them a donation.
 2. When his nephew wished him “Merry Christmas” and invited him to dinner Christmas Day, he declined with, “Bah! Humbug!”

3. He thought Bob Cratchit a *lunatic* for his Christmas joy: “*my clerk, with fifteen shillings a week, and a wife and family, talking about a merry Christmas.*”
4. When solicitors asked his help in providing for the poor, he said, “*Are there no prisons...no workhouses?... those who are badly off must go there.*” / They persisted, “*Many can’t go there; and many would rather die.*” Scrooge replied, “*If they would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.*”

TRANS: What a miserable soul! And yet **divine light can retrieve us from being sinfully set in our ways.** Christmas offers hope to such a dark soul, because it marks the coming of Christ, “*a light shining in a dark place.*” For Ebenezer Scrooge’s dark heart, *that hope begins with...*

II. The Haunting of Redemptive Remorse

- A. After dying 7 years earlier, the ghost of his partner Jacob Marley came to warn him of his hellish destiny, saying, “*no space of regret can make amends for one life’s opportunity misused!*”
- B. When Scrooge asks why a chain binds Marley to ghostly ledgers and money boxes, he says, “*I wear the chain I forged in life. I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you?*” (Marley said Scrooge had been making one too, but he couldn’t see it....)
- C. Marley’s misery was to roam the afterlife seeing human needs he might have helped meet in life but was powerless to meet in death.
- D. Marley and Scrooge were good at the bad business of selfishness. [**Marley laments**, “*Business! Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business.... At this time of the rolling year, I suffer most. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode! Were there no poor homes to which its light would have conducted me!*”]

TRANS: The *blood* of Him Who came on the 1st Christmas can wash away the guilt of personal sin, but not the deeds of personal history. Marley said he forged his chain by his “own free will,” but how free was that will? Only in the present can we choose to do good or evil, but the transformation of present choices must often begin with...

III. The Healing of a Haunted Past

- A. Scrooge thought Marley’s ghost a “*humbug* until the *Ghost of Christmas Past* appeared with a flaming light jetting from its head.
 1. This ghost, and the two others in the story, had a mission similar to the work of the Holy Spirit— John 16:8. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to **sin** and **righteousness** and **judgment**.
 2. But the Holy Spirit comes to teach, not to control the human will. [**When Scrooge asked** the ghost to put on the *great extinguisher* it carried for a cap, the ghost exclaimed, “*What! would you so soon put out, with worldly hands, the light I give? Is it not enough that you are one of those whose passions made this cap, and force me through whole trains of years to wear it low upon my brow!*”] (God does let humans say ‘No’ to light.)
- B. In showing Scrooge his past Christmases, the ghost allowed him to review forgotten blessings and mentally-repressed misfortunes:
 1. His stern father left him at school for the holidays, but reading imaginative stories lightened his loneliness [**Seeing himself** as that *lonely boy*, he regretted not giving a gift to a young caroler earlier that night.]
 2. He saw Fan again, his sister who dearly loved him and who had given birth to his nephew before she died as a young mother.
 3. He saw old Fezziwig, his 1st employer, who had been so kind and generous, putting on a dance that thrilled Scrooge. [**Seeing this festivity** pricked his conscience about the disparaging words he’d said to his employee, Bob Cratchit.] (You see, the magic was starting to work...)
 4. He saw his fiancée Belle breaking up with him because she felt displaced by his new “*golden idol*,” then saw her later as a happy young mother with children that might have been his own....
- C. The only reason the Holy Spirit shows us our past is for healing:
 1. When He helps us review past blessings, a grateful response can soften a heart that has become hardened with ingratitude.
 2. When He helps us to forgive those who bought pain to us in the past, it’s to undo the cords of bitterness that bind us in the present. (It isn’t just cruel people we need to forgive, but often loved ones... or ourselves... and sometimes even God.)

CONCLUSION:

–But Scrooge couldn’t stand the light was cast upon that last revelation about his fiancée [**The visitation with the Ghost of Christmas Past ended** with a “struggle.... Scrooge... seized the extinguisher-cap, and by a sudden action pressed it down upon its head. / The Spirit dropped beneath it, so that the extinguisher covered