

## Christmas at the Movies

### *A Christmas Carol*

This December we are doing *Christmas at the Movies* – seeking to understand the true meaning of Christmas by looking through the experiences of various movie characters. In particular, we want to see the transformation that occurs in their lives in relation to their Christmas.

Last week we used *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. In this kids' favorite, we saw how Christmas was transformed for Charlie Brown. Today, we are going to see Christmas through the life of Ebenezer Scrooge – the title character in the story penned by Charles Dickens.

*A Christmas Carol* was published on December 19, 1843. The story was an instant hit, selling over 6,000 copies in just one week. There have been more than 200 adaptations of this Christmas story in theater, opera, film, radio and television.

In the beginning of the movie we see that Scrooge is an old and bitter miser. He cares for no one but himself; nothing but his money. His heart is cold and calculating.

He returns to his house; it's Christmas Eve. As he settles in for the night, he is confronted by the ghost of Jacob Marley, his former partner who has been deceased for seven years. Marley, who was much like Scrooge in his preoccupation with business affairs, appears to warn Scrooge and hold out hope for him.

Marley tells Ebenezer he will be visited by three spirits before the night passes: the Ghost of Christmas Past, the Ghost of Christmas Present, and the Ghost of Christmas Yet-to-Come. Ebenezer will get a good glimpse of what was, of what is, and of what will be.

At midnight, Scrooge is visited by the *Ghost of Christmas Past*. He takes Ebenezer on a journey into some of his happiest and saddest moments of his past:

- He is taken back to when he was a boy, abandoned by friends and family. His mother had died giving birth to him and his father always carried a grudge against him for it.

- When he was a young man in boarding school, his sister who loved him dearly, talked father into letting him come home. Yet, he still experienced rejection.
- Scrooge becomes an apprentice to a local merchant, Mr. Fezziwig, where he is delightfully happy. He finds joy, fun and acceptance. He falls in love with a young woman named Belle.

But Scrooge is so intent on building his business, pursuing the making of money to become financially well-off, that he is forced to make a choice. He chooses to sever his relationship with his fiancé and continue to pursue his business success.

Ebenezer Scrooge is forced to see how his past experiences have made him who he was in the present, and how the choices he had made shaped him into the person he had become.

And, so it is with you and me!

The poet William Faulkner wrote, “The past is not dead; in fact, the past is not even past.” Much of what you are today is the result of the choices and experiences of your past. Your life is not an empty canvass. The brushstrokes of your past are prominent on the painting of your present.

Ebenezer Scrooge is a product of his past, as are we. You cannot change the fact of the past, but what you can change is the interpretation of the past and the degree to which the past dictates how you live in the present.

But, we don't want to get ahead of the story.

At the stroke of one a.m., Ebenezer is visited by the second spirit – the *Ghost of Christmas Present*.

Following a visit to the marketplace, Scrooge is taken to the home of Bob Cratchit – his employee who is overworked and underpaid. He sees Cratchit's family including young Tiny Tim who is crippled. In the process, he will get a little of his own medicine from the spirit.

Ebenezer saw the power to influence lives, in this case – not for the good. He had closed his heart off to all those around him: his family, associates, and the poor about him. Life in the present for Scrooge all revolved around him.

It is so easy, isn't it, to be consumed with ourselves – our needs, our wants, our desires, our well-being, and care little for others.

The Apostle John instructed followers of Jesus to be mindful of the needs of others. He wrote:

“We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion, how can God's love be in that person? Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.” (I John 3:16-18)

Someone once wisely said, “The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much. It is whether we provide enough for those who have so little.”

As we saw last week, Charlie Brown learned that the true meaning of Christmas was found in understanding giving – it was in the action of God himself who gave a priceless gift to us – a Savior, Christ the Lord.

Scrooge is concerned only about himself. Those choices made him into the man he was. But the *Ghost of Christmas Present* was stirring him up, even in spite of himself.

There is one more spirit who comes calling – The *Ghost of Christmas Yet-to-Come*. This spirit, completely robed in black, who does not speak but only points, shows the future to Scrooge.

First, he is taken to the Cratchit home to see the reality of their loss in Tiny Tim's death. There, even in sorrow, there is a fond remembrance of Tiny Tim and the conviction that they were blessed in the time he was with them.

Scrooge had seen enough and asks the spirit to take him home. But Scrooge is not taken home. He is taken to the cemetery and shown his own mortality – his end. And what a contrast to the experience in the Cratchit family!

In his death, no one really notices; no one cares. Everything he owned is left behind; nothing goes on the next journey. His home is stripped of its belongings and sold to others.

He is then taken to the cemetery where he sees his grave. Scrooge seems to be aware of the truth of Scripture: “It is appointed unto every man once to die; then comes the judgment.”

Scrooge is overwhelmed with the despair of a meaningless life and death. Again, what a contrast to the memory of young Tim Cratchit.

He asks the spirit, “Are these things that will be or things that may be?”

Then he makes this statement of wishful hope: “Men’s courses will foreshadow certain ends. I accept it. But if those courses be departed from, the ends must change. Tell me that is so.”

Ebenezer is asking if it’s possible to change. Is there any hope? Am I simply stuck because of my past, condemned because of my past choices, or can the future be changed?

As the spirit departs, Ebenezer Scrooge is on his knees, praying, calling out for help.

Now, here is where we need to see for ourselves the truth and the power of the Gospel – of the Cross – meeting the hopelessness and despair of a self-consumed life. This is where the liberation of the soul enters the scene.

The true meaning of Christmas is redemptive in nature. The shepherds outside Bethlehem were told by the angel:

“I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people – even Ebenezer Scrooge – for today in the city of David, there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

This realization was dawning on Scrooge. What would he do with this new awareness? He could dismiss it and write it off as a bad case of gruel or a demented nightmare and nothing else.

But Ebenezer chose differently. He embraced the truth that had been presented to him, and that choice profoundly affected and changed him. His life would never be the same. He was beginning to experience the transformation of a soul.

At the dawning of Christmas Day, he buys the biggest turkey in the market and sends it anonymously to the Cratchit home. Scrooge experiences the joy – the over-powering, all-encompassing joy of Christmas. Listen, here’s the key:

Nothing changed around him. But, Ebenezer Scrooge changed! And because he had changed, others around him were changed – all for the good.

Scrooge goes to his nephew’s house and repents of the way he has lived his life. He asks of them: “God forgive me for the time I’ve wasted.” And we see the joy of reconciliation.

He doubles Cratchit’s pay; he becomes a better person, a better relative, a better boss. This is the power of a changed life, a life transformed. We all have a past that has shaped our lives, but the message of Christmas is one of hope. Our lives can be changed by the power of Jesus Christ, that Savior whose birth we celebrate at Christmas.

Do you know this Savior? Has he set you free from your past – a life controlled and dominated by sin?

Don’t miss the true meaning of Christmas – a personal Savior, a transforming power in our lives.