

Behind The Scenes Christmas Edition Part 1: Scrooge Life vs. J.O.Y. Life (12-4-19)

Believe it or not, Christmas is upon us. And this is the time when the Christmas movies and TV shows start coming out again. Christmas has been a huge theme in the movies & TV since their inception, and there are literally 100s & 100s of Christmas shows & movies now. And c'mon admit it, you all have a favorite Christmas movie or show: *Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer*, *Frosty The Snowman*, *Miracle on 34th Street*, *The Santa Clause*, *Elf*, *The Grinch*, *Polar Express*, etc. And for the sentimental folks out there, there's the endless list of Hallmark channel Christmas movies: *The Christmas Note...*, *Kiss ...List, ...Memory, ...Shoes, ...Cottage*, etc. One of my favorites is *A Christmas Carol*, based on Charles Dickens' short novel published in 1843. There are dozens of film, TV & musical adaptations of this ranging from a very early silent version from 1901 to a 2009 CGI version featuring Jim Cary. And 176 years after it was penned, new versions are still in the works.

Dickens' tale revolves around Ebenezer Scrooge, a joyless, cold-hearted businessman who refuses to help anyone but himself. Scrooge is especially offended by Christmas and all the joy, charity and goodness that it brings. Scrooge refuses to celebrate the festive holiday in any form and spurns anyone associated with it. Haunted by the ghost of his former partner, Jacob Marley, and three "Christmas spirits", Scrooge is shown what a truly self-centered, greedy, heartless and bitter person he truly is. When confronted with his future death & the death of Tiny Tim, his employee Bob Cratchet's son, Scrooge has a monumental change of heart. Realizing that he is alive and this is it Christmas Day, Scrooge experiences true joy & goes about with his new heart of Christmas blessing all those that he'd formerly spurned.

The basic message in *A Christmas Carol* is if you're self-focused, self-absorbed & you don't care for Jesus Christ (God's ultimate Christmas gift) and for your fellow man, you curse others & bring eternal curse upon yourself; so let God change your heart while you still can. Alternatively, if you open your heart to the gift of Christmas- Jesus Christ born the first Christmas- and love people, you bring joyous blessings to those here on earth & you will experience God's eternal joy & blessing in heaven. *A Christmas Carol* shows us that there's great hope in Christ and a new heart of love & joy available to all who accept Jesus, God's Christmas gift.

A Christmas Carol teaches us some simple, but very important lessons:

- 1.) **Idols & Selfishness Destroy:** If you shut out Jesus from your life (aka the Gift of Christmas) & fail to accept Him as Lord, another 'god' or idol will take Jesus' place and that will destroy you. In the case of Scrooge, the new 'god' or idol was money. It destroyed his engagement and left him with a bitter heart that no woman wanted to marry. Money destroyed his joy and his heart, turning Scrooge into a heartless miser. Idols & self-focus will do that. **Jer 17:5** says, "I, the Lord, have put a curse on those who turn from Me and trust in human strength." God's first commandment is: "You shall have no other gods before Me." **Ex 20:3**
- 2.) **Sin Destroys:** Marley cried out to Scrooge, "I wear the chains I forged in life." The chains represented the regrets/results of sinful, uncaring behaviors that eternally separated him from the joy of God's presence in eternity. Jesus came to break every chain & free us from those sins eternally (**Rom 6:10-11** "When Jesus died, He died once to break the power of sin. But now that He lives, He lives for the glory of God. So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.")
- 3.) **People's struggles are our business:** Scrooge told Marley that Jacob had been a good businessman in life. Marley then bellows at Scrooge about what his life's work should have been: 'Business!' cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. 'Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. Our business in this life is mankind. **James 1:27** Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you. **Mt 25:40** The King [Jesus] 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.'
- 4.) **It's better to give than receive.** Scrooge finally realized this at the end of *A Christmas Carol* as his life was transformed. (**Acts 20:25** And I have been a constant example of how you can help those in need by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.')
- 5.) **Jesus is the source of true Joy:** The real gift of Christmas is Jesus our Lord & Savior, and Christ alone brings true JOY! The Cratchet's (exemplified by Tiny Tim & his father Bob) realized that Jesus was the source of true joy despite their very rough circumstances in life. **1Pt 1:8** You love Him [Jesus] even though you have never seen Him. Though you do not see Him now, you trust Him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. The reward for trusting Him will be the salvation of your souls. **Rom 15:30** I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christmas is a time of great joy: joy that God sent Jesus to save us from ourselves, our sin & eternal hell itself. Christmas is a time to joyously thank God & joyously love on others. So at Christmas when you see the word "Joy", first think "Jesus Christ" and thank Him for what He did for you. Jesus is the "J" in JOY & "Christ" is the C-H-R-I-S-T in Christmas. If you want the kind of Joy in all of life's situations, you can only get it from Jesus! If you put Jesus first in all things, you'll have unending, unspeakable Joy! (**Mt 6:33; Mt 22:37-38**) Next, when you see the word "Joy", remember Others – love them, serve them and share the Joy of Lord with them (**Mt 22:39**). This will bring you even more Joy and bring the people you bless joy too! Finally, you can't forget about Yourself (the "Y" in JOY). You've got to be purposeful about your life & your attitudes & your faith or something less than God, less than Jesus will take hold & you will not have true JOY, PEACE, HOPE, HEALING, FREEDOM, NEW LIFE or ETERNAL LIFE. No one can force you to choose Jesus or force you to love Him, trust Him & follow Him. You have to make that decision. No one can force you to put others first & love them like you love yourself. You have to make those decisions. But by choosing J.O.Y., choosing Jesus & choosing to put others first, Jesus will give you true JOY! That gift of true JOY is what Christmas is really all about! ! !

SCRIPTURES

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Ex 20:3 "You shall have no other gods before Me."

Rom 6:10-11 "When Jesus died, He died once to break the power of sin. But now that He lives, He lives for the glory of God. So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus."

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Acts 20:25 And I have been a constant example of how you can help those in need by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

1Pt 1:8 You love Him [Jesus] even though you have never seen Him. Though you do not see Him now, you trust Him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. The reward for trusting Him will be the salvation of your souls.

Rom 15:30 I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Mt 6:33 Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

Mt 22:37-39 Jesus replied, "'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. A Christmas Carol is one of hundreds of What's your favorite Christmas movie or TV show?

II. Dickens' story A Christmas Carol teaches us some very important lessons about the real meaning of Christmas.

Let's discuss the 5 points of Dan's message & see what God can teach us through this amazing tale.

1. Idols & Selfishness Destroy . Read **Jer 17:5 & Ex 20:3**. If you shut out Jesus from your life (aka the Gift of Christmas) & fail to accept Him as Lord, another 'god' or idol will take Jesus' place and that will destroy you. In the case of Scrooge, the new 'god' or idol was money. It destroyed his engagement and left him as a stingy man with a bitter heart that no woman wanted to marry. The idol of money destroyed his joy & his heart, turning Scrooge into a heartless miser.

A.) How do idols and selfishness destroy people today? B.) Are there any idols in your life that need to be destroyed?

2. Sin Destroys Read **Rom 6:10-11**. Marley cried out to Scrooge, "I wear the chains I forged in life." The chains represented the regrets/results of sinful, uncaring behaviors that eternally separated him from the joy of God's presence in eternity. As Rom 6 said, Jesus came to break every chain & free us from those sins eternally.

So, right now in your life, are you forging chains of sin & regret or a freedom-giving relationship with Jesus Christ?

3. People's struggles are our business: Read **James 1:27 & Mt 25:40**. Scrooge told Marley that Jacob had been a good businessman in life. Marley then bellows at Scrooge about what his life's work should have been: 'Business!' cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. 'Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. Our business in this life is mankind. **Are you looking out for others who are less fortunate & helping them fill their needs or are you turning a blind eye toward them?**

4. It's better to give than receive. Read **Acts 20:25**. Scrooge finally learned the lesson of giving at the end of the story when his life was transformed. **Why is giving was better than receiving? Is giving better than receiving for you?**

5. Jesus is the source of true joy: Read **1Pt 1:8 & Rom 15:30**. The real gift of Christmas is Jesus, our Savior; He alone brings true JOY! The Bob Cratchet & his son Tiny Tim realized that Jesus was the source of true joy despite their very rough circumstances in life. **Do you have true joy in your life? Do you want it? What needs to change?**

III. FINAL QUESTION: Read **Mt 6:33 & Mt 22:37-39**. Tonight we got J.O.Y. buttons representing Jesus, Others & Yourself.

What do you think of the J.O.Y. principle? How would your life be different if you lived like that?

CLOSING PRAYER: God thank you for the Joy of Christmas – Your Son Jesus Christ, who came as a baby to later die on the cross to free us from our sins. Help us to keep Jesus in our hearts this Christmas season & throughout the year. Help us learn tonight's lessons of love & joy. Help us to live out the JOY principle by putting You & others ahead of our own desires & wants. We love you Jesus & thank You tonight. Amen!