

November 29, 2015 – First Sunday of Advent (Series title: “Humbug to Humble”)
“Bah Humbug!”

Philippians 2:3-7

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.

Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.

The title of our Advent Preaching series this year is, “Humbug to Humble.” The title of today’s message, on this First Sunday of Advent 2015 is, “Bah Humbug!” - a saying that means, “Oh, nonsense!” and was made famous by the Charles Dickens character Ebenezer Scrooge in the story, “A Christmas Carol.”

This morning we gave out copies of the complete text of this famous and cherished Christmas story. But it is a special edition because it includes notes by author Stephen Skelton that reveal how much Dickens was influenced by Jesus. The very title of the book is an example. When we think of a Christmas Carol we may think of secular Christmas songs like Jingle Bells, or Deck the Halls [at a community Thanksgiving service on Wednesday held at the temple, a pastor pointed out that most of the Christmas Carols were written by Jews. He was thinking of secular songs like, “The Christmas Song (Chestnuts roasting on an open fire) or White Christmas). But Dickens uses the original meaning of carol: a song celebrating the birth of Christ.

I spoke to Stephen Skelton on the phone a couple of weeks ago and he gave me another example: we know that a nativity is also called a crèche (pronounced: *crash*). In the time of Dickens in England it was known as a cratch from which Dickens got the name Cratchit. Skelton said, when Scrooge came to the Cratchit home he was coming to the nativity.

So we hope you will read this book during our Advent Preaching Series, but, because of the notes and symbolism you will never read the story of “A Christmas Carol” in the same way again.

Jesus often taught using parables. That is, He used stories of real life examples to show the relevancy of spiritual truths. We are going to use Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol as a parable in our Advent sermons.

So, let’s begin by first watching this clip from “Scrooge” a 1951 film adaptation of Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol that starred Alastair Sim as Ebenezer Scrooge.

Scrooge means “squeeze” and is used by Dickens to point out Ebenezer’s primary sin of selfishness and greed – a sure sign of selfishness is greed.

We are all selfish

Let’s not be too quick to judge old Ebenezer Scrooge for all of us have a degree of selfishness. Selfishness is deceptive; it is much easier to detect the selfishness of others while being blinded to our own selfishness. But how many of us love with absolute pure motives all the time?

“Almost every sinful action ever committed can be traced back to a selfish motive. It is a trait we hate in other people but justify in ourselves.”

Stephen Kendrick, *The Love Dare*

Commercials tell us, “you deserve a break today;” A hair coloring company’s slogan is, “Because I’m worth it!” We have a tendency to look out for number one. Selfishness leads us to do whatever it takes to look out for number one. We think, “How else am I going to get what I want? No one else is going to look out for me so I better look out for myself? We are told that our destiny is in our hands?”

Selfishness is really our attempt to control our own destiny, rather than allow God to lead us. Yet, it is only in Christ that you will gain the satisfaction and security you seek. The ultimate act of selfishness is to hear what Christ has done for you and say, “I don’t need You.”

Paul gave this warning: 2 Timothy 3:1-5

You should know this ... that in the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that!

We are all hurt by selfishness:

The selfishness of others hurts us and our selfishness hurts others. Scrooge was blinded to how his selfishness was hurting others, like Bob Cratchit and Fred, Scrooge’s nephew. Scrooge was miserable and he didn’t want others to be happy either. Bob Cratchit had a generous spirit, but suffered under Scrooge’s selfishness – suffered by Scrooge’s stinginess. Fred was kind, forgiving, and caring which caused him to be mocked by his uncle Scrooge and suffered by Scrooge’s coldness.

Demanding our needs be satisfied, then expanding to more and more needs and demanding they be satisfied this we believe to be freedom. When we think we are automatically entitled to something, we will walk over others to get it.

Selfishness destroys relationships as you serve yourself first. In contrast, humility builds relationships because in humility you seek to meet the needs of others before your own. When you act in humility you act like Christ, when you act in selfishness you act like satan.

James 3:13-15

If you are wise and understand God's ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your heart, don't cover up the truth with boasting and lying. For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and demonic.

Can you think of how your selfishness has hurt others? How about how it has hurt you?

By cutting himself off from the kindness of others Scrooge suffered from his own selfishness the most. Scrooge didn't even notice how his selfishness and greed was making himself miserable – he was unloving, unloved and unhappy. When his nephew, Fred wishes his uncle Ebenezer a Merry Christmas, Scrooge responds, “Bah humbug – oh nonsense” and says, “what right do you have be merry you're poor enough,” to which his nephew wisely states, “what right do you have be dismal you're rich enough.”

In his selfishness Scrooge was trapped by himself. Selfishly focusing on yourself creates a self imposed prison – from which you cannot please yourself enough to free yourself. Our selfishness not only hurts others it hurts us.

We should be aware of what we give up when we act with selfishness and greed. In our selfish efforts to gain material things, we don't think twice about trading our eternal souls. Instead, we should be willing to give our very lives for the sake of Christ. In doing this, we will gain the satisfaction and security that we so desperately seek.

Mark 8:36

And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?

Luke 12:15

Then he said, "Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own."

Selfish people actually cheat themselves out of the greatest possession they could ever have: eternal life with God. In our intense focus on this life, we fail to prepare for the next life. In Luke 12:20-21 Jesus gives this warning:

"But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?'

"Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God."

By being selfish you actually cheat yourself out of the greatest possession you could ever have: eternal life.

Romans 2:7-8a

He will give eternal life to those who keep on doing good, seeking after the glory and honor and immortality that God offers. But he will pour out his anger and wrath on those who live for themselves.

So how do we go from humbug to humble?

First and foremost, faith in Christ; Christ purifies our hearts by faith. Only God can change a selfish heart to a heart of humble love.

Philippians 2:3

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.

The opposite of selfishness is humility, which is to think of others as better than yourself. It is an attitude of a servant, and it is the same attitude that was in Christ Jesus.

Though He is God, He gave up His divine privileges; He took the humble position of a servant and was born as a human being which we celebrate this time of year.

When you put your faith in Jesus you will gain the satisfaction and security you seek.

Matthew 6:19-21, 33

"Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be... Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

Selfishness must have no part in the life of someone who is a follower of Jesus. We are commanded to have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. How do you stop being selfish? Allow Jesus to lead you and develop a servant's heart with the goal of helping others.