

12-13-15 – A Christmas Carol - The Ghost of Christmas Present A Present Repentance – 2 Cor.7:10

Tis the season – it's all about the presents! Newsday article – Scant Inflation seen in '12 Days of Christmas' - An annual survey to see how the prices are changing from year to year in buying these 12 gifts today. ☺ READ NEWSDAY ARTICLE or excerpts.

We will be looking at a different type of present today. Our section of A Christmas Carol this week takes us to the visitation of the Ghost of Christmas Present. The message title: **A Present Repentance.**

We have seen so far that Ebenezer Scrooge is a miserable man, who has messed up his life in the past and that has carried over into who he has become in the present. The visit of Jacob Marley and the first Ghost have touched him deeply with regret. Scrooge saw things of his past that he regretted, but couldn't do anything about. Now regret needs to lead him to a true repentance in order to recover and change the course of future events. We all can make a difference, and an impact on the future for good or for evil. I would choose to work for the good – I hope you would too.

Remorse: *A bank hired a fellow to be a janitor. They closed early one day and he was in a hurry to get home like the others, so he quickly gathered up the trash. In this particular bank, all the trash was shredded. So he emptied all of what he believed to be trash, and sent it through the shredder. Just before he finished the last barrel, the closing cashier discovered he had shredded all the deposits of that day.*

Well, two things happened. You can guess the first one. And after he was fired, they brought in a number of people early the next morning and seated them at a long series of tables. They tried to put together the shredded checks, attempting to match tiny little pieces of signature, amounts of money, places, events, and so on. It made the headlines of the news with three words, "An impossible Job." You could never put together thousands of checks that had been shredded, not matter how many people you hire. It's simply impossible. The remorse of the janitor could not change the outcome of this colossal mistake. (Chuck Swindoll).

Anyone and everyone can experience regret in what they have done or didn't do in life. What good is that alone? However, repentance is different. It is not regret, but it takes regret to the next level... we admit we were wrong and have offended God and others. We don't like to repent. Whenever we are confronted with our wrong actions, we most often become prideful and defensive. So, God provides a "Godly sorrow" that should lead us to repentance – a turning away from our sin and toward God. Worldly sorrow or regret only motivates us to stop getting caught in our sin. Godly sorrow through repentance leads to eternal life, while worldly sorrow ends in eternal death.

2 Cor. 7:10 – NLT – "For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death."

“Repentance comes after regret for those who learn from their mistakes. However, it is impossible to repent from a mistake you do not admit you made.” (A Christmas Carol Bible Study)

Pr. 28:13 (NLT) – “People who conceal their sins will not prosper but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy.”

We all like to bury our mistakes and sins behind us and move on, but if we do that we usually just repeat the same sins again and again. Instead of repeating our behavior, we should repent and ask God to remove them from our life. Scrooge saw some things in his past that deeply disturbed him. Having been sensitized to that, he was able to see more clearly the mistakes of his present life. Then the Spirit revealed to him that the future events could be altered by his future actions.

PLAY VIDEO CLIP –

I learned some things about this Spirit from the booklet we handed out and its margin notes. The Spirit wears a wreath of Holly leaves on his head. It is suggested that he represents Christ; the spiny leaves suggest the crown of thorns Jesus wore. The red berries suggest the blood that was shed for our sins; the green color suggests eternal life – an ever-green tree. Jesus is God who came to the present and lived among us. Also, and I never noticed this before in all the times I’ve seen this movie, the Spirit is bare-chested under his robe and bare-footed too.

READ: P. 29 of the booklet – description of the Ghost of Christmas Present...

The chest contains the heart – the center of goodwill. The Spirit’s goodwill cannot be contained. The scabbard is empty because the Spirit is a messenger of Christ, the Prince of Peace, who holds ultimate victory – no need for a sword.

This scene in the clip is the turning point in Scrooge’s life, I believe. Here is a sense of reality that he never saw before or would have allowed himself to see.

The visit to the Cratchit’s home on Christmas Day hit home with Ebenezer. Scrooge had been mistreating and underpaying Bob Cratchit all along and never knew the man he was mistreating. Bob was a loyal employee and catered to his employer’s every need and beyond. While Bob may have realized his own need, he was always respectful and caring toward Scrooge. Ebenezer’s sin blinded him to the facts of reality. He was oblivious to the real life situation Bob was in. Sin has a way of doing that. As PJ spoke a couple of weeks ago, Scrooge’s selfishness was a root cause to his miserable life.

Later on in the movie, Scrooge’s nephew, Fred, hits the nail on the head. He says who is he really hurting by his stinginess and cruelty? Only himself. He has missed out on a family that could love him and embrace him, but Scrooge is more obsessed about his money and leaving nothing to his family than about relationships. This is to his detriment. But, as the Ghost shows him these things, Scrooge’s heart is being softened and prepared by God for true repentance. This is a repentance story with its benefits.

This visit was particularly powerful for Scrooge. He had seen the error of his ways. He was shown a mistake he made in his past, and now he is being shown a mistake he is making in his present. The Spirit also told him that the present actions can alter the future. His repentance was also helped along by his future punishment – more on that next week.

Repentance isn’t true repentance unless it is heartfelt – genuine.

Job 42:5-6 (NLT) – “I had only heard about you before, but now I have seen you with my own eyes. I take back everything I said, and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance.”

What a powerful thing it was for Scrooge not to just hear about the consequences and present situation before him, but to actually see it. The Spirit put flesh on Scrooge’s condition by showing him the Cratchit family and the love they had and shared. They were thankful for what they had and for each other, with no bitterness for what others had or what they didn’t have. They were bitter toward Scrooge, except for Bob and Tiny Tim. And that made all the difference for Ebenezer.

“To make our repentance heartfelt, we might need to examine the effects of our actions.” Can you get a visual of the impact your sin has had or is having on those around you or even on yourself? This should be motivation to repent before God and get things right. He is waiting for that exact thing. He is prompting you and me with regret to lead us to repentance and then renewal.

Once we are truly repentant, we change the things we do and the thoughts we have. John the Baptist said:

Mt. 3:8 (NLT) – “Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God.”

Repentance should bear fruit. God expects a change or we may have not truly repented at all. Feeling sorry is not enough. There must be a change. A change of mind (metanoia), and a change in behavior. As Christians, do we call ourselves people of God and then do nothing for God or for people? Only if we bear fruit are we useful to God. He takes this seriously, and so should we.

The Spirit told Scrooge that Tim would die if things did not change. Then he threw Scrooge’s words back to him about ‘decreasing the surplus population.’ This hit Scrooge in the depth of his heart. He told Scrooge that unless the course was altered by the present, the future would be bleak for Tim. Something needed to be done, and it implied that Scrooge was the one who had to do it.

The old Humbug Scrooge needed to hear the words of Paul...

Rom. 2:5 (NLT) – “But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming, when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.”

This is obviously not a good place to be. But, God is so gracious to us, He gives us more time to learn this great lesson and repent.

2 Pet. 3:9 (NLT) – “The Lord isn’t really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, He is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.”

Jesus came to this earth to bring a message of repentance to the world. He didn’t come for us to celebrate with parties, gifts, family gatherings and stories of Santa and reindeer. He came to call a sin-filled world back to God. He paid the price and shed His blood for our forgiveness of sin. He came for the sin sick and worthless – which is what everyone of us were on our own. He came to make us feel regret for our sin and repent. He came to call us back to God – to a place where we are loved and protected. He came to offer us eternal life – heaven – a time of being in His presence forever.

He didn't come to make our life here better, but to offer us a better life in Him. He gave his all for you and me. How does that move you toward Him?

2 Cor. 7:10 (MSG) – *Distress that drives us to God does that. It turns us around. It gets us back in the way of salvation. We never regret that kind of pain. But those who let distress drive them away from God are full of regrets, (and) end up on a deathbed of regrets.*

Growth is a natural part of life, both physically and spiritually. But this “naturalness” doesn’t mean that growth is painless. Growth calls into action new parts of our minds, our emotions, our bodies. What we experience at these times often feels like pain. We aren’t used to stretching ourselves in these ways. But the pain shouldn’t surprise us – our muscles ache whenever we take up new activities, and they’re stretched in ways they aren’t used to. Athletes get sore muscles when they begin their training. Similarly, as we’re in training in the Christian life, it stretches us beyond ourselves, and that hurts. But this kind of pain is very different from the kind that’s inflicted by torture. Growing pains are the kinds we don’t regret, because they lead to a fuller life, not a diminished one. (EP)

When you sense regret in your life, don't just leave it there. It may be God trying to get your attention and lead you to repentance, which will restore you to Him and bring you a fuller life. Godly sorrow leads us to repentance - Follow His leading. God is patiently postponing judgment to give each of us more time to repent, especially those who don't know about His plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. *“When we are repentant, we show God that we know we have sinned, we confess our sins to him, and we acknowledge we need his power to continue to repent.”*

Tiny Tim is known for his line: God Bless us Everyone!

Well – God has blessed us, everyone, and you can cash in on it right now...

1 John 1:9 (NLT) – *“But if we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts.”*

That's a promise from God. A spiritual cleansing is available to EVERYONE who repents and confesses to God. He promises to forgive your sins and cleanse you. This puts us in a right relationship with God. It is there for those who don't know God at all, and it's there for those of us who know God but fumble along the way and need constant forgiveness and restoration. Every one of us has sinned – We all fall short of God's perfect intent for our lives. We all have missed the mark. Don't you want to be right with God? It's more important than being right with your boss, company, friends, family or anything else. He is waiting for you to respond. Do it now! It's actually very easy. God designed it that way. You don't have to DO anything except realize you have sinned and can't save yourself. God has done everything for you in Jesus, and He offers it to you as a GIFT. Won't you accept His gift to you this Christmas?