

December 18, 2005

## Writing a Good Ending to Your "Christmas Carol"

### John 3:16-18

#### INTRODUCTION

Every year we seem to see a new collection of letters children wrote to Santa Claus. Here are some cute ones.

"Dear Santa, there are three little boys who live at our house. There is Jeffrey; he is 2. There is David; he is 4. And there is Norman; he is 7. Jeffrey is good some of the time. David is good some of the time. But Norman is good all of the time." And it was signed--you guessed it--Norman.

"Dear Santa, I dont want nothing Xmas except toys. Please dont bring me clothes again. Billy."

"Dear Santa, I want a different borthor for chrissmas. Debbie."

"Hi Santa" I would like a Joycam so I can take pictures of all my friends and a roller coaster for my backyard and a computer and a 30' t.v and i'll e-mail you the rest later. thank you Emma

"Dear Santa, you did not bring me anything good last year. You did not bring me anything good the year before that. This is your last chance. Signed, Alfred."

In this young man's mind Santa wasn't measuring up and it was time to change.

**What can we do when we learn we're not measuring up? Is there hope for another opportunity? Or are we doomed by our failures?**

This is the major question addressed by Charles Dickens in A Christmas Carol.

The Ghost of Christmas Future arrives and shows Scrooge his destiny.

The encounter with this ghost brings all of us face to face with the reality of life and death.

The climax brings Scrooge to a church graveyard.

**T.S. Watch this video clip with me.**

**(VIDEO)**

**In effect, Scrooge is asking if he can write a different ending to his tale. He begs for the chance to alter his life and so alter the outcome.**

**Would you, too, like to write a good ending to your own "Christmas Carol" this year?**



**THE GREAT PROMISE OF THE CHRISTMAS SEASON IS THAT IT IS NOT TOO LATE TO EXPERIENCE CHANGE.**

What are the Keys to Writing a Good ending to our Christmas Story?

### I. Recognizing the Truth about Ourselves

We are to trust Jesus' words in John 8:32,

“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

- first it will likely make you miserable!
- It's not always easy to hear the truth.

One such story was that of the rich man and a poor man, Lazarus (different from the Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead in John 11) in Luke 16:19–31:

*There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire." But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us." He answered, "Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment." Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them." "No, father Abraham," he said, "but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent." He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."*

Like Scrooge, the rich man is shown the consequences of his choices--but for him, it was too late.

## II. Accepting the Truth about God

- God's purpose in calling us to face the truth is not to discourage us--any more than a doctor intends to upset or insult us by telling us the hard truth about our disease.
- He tells us the truth so we can understand the possibilities for healing.
- We must hear the bad news in order to receive the good news.
- The good news--indeed the Great News!--is that God's goal is our redemption, our reconciliation, and our salvation.

*John 3:16-19*

*16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*

## III. Paying attention to God

The wise men paid attention to God. Unlike Herod, they followed the Lord's leading.

Matthew 2:2

"Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

They took the risk of seeing what God was doing, and of going where God was working. As a result, they had the unspeakable joy of meeting the Christ child.

Are you looking beyond the circumstances of this world to see the hand of God at work in your midst?  
Have you taken time to read God's Word, so that you can know his mind and heart?

#### IV. Being ready to make sacrifices to follow God's leading

The wise men sacrificed whatever was necessary to respond to God. They left their homes and endured a rigorous journey, with an uncertain outcome. In the process, they gave both themselves and their gifts.

Matthew 2:11

Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

Gerald H. Bath tells this story about a missionary teaching in Africa. Before Christmas he had been telling his native students how Christians, as an expression of their joy, gave each other presents on Christ's birthday.

On Christmas morning, one of the natives brought the missionary a seashell of lustrous beauty. When asked where he had discovered such an extraordinary shell, the native said he had walked many miles to a certain bay, the only spot where such shells could be found.

"I think it was wonderful of you to travel so far to get this lovely gift for me," the teacher exclaimed.

His eyes brightening, the native replied, "Long walk, part of the gift."<sup>[1]</sup>

#### V. Starting New Life Now!

I am struck by the phrase in Matthew 2:12: "They went home another way."

I know this literally means that the wise men took a different route home, because they wanted to avoid running into Herod and having to expose the birthplace of the Messiah. But I can't help seeing a homiletical gem in the fact that they went home as different people because they had met the Lord. They were not the same, because they had met the living Lord and seen him work. I have to believe they changed their priorities. They learned the joy of worship instead of exalting themselves, the joy of giving instead of hoarding.

The hope of Christmas is that God can change us. We can be different people. By faith in Christ, we can write a new ending, a very happy ending to our "Christmas Carol," and to our entire lives.

##### The Blessing of Wet Cement

My past may be chiseled in stone.

But I'm grateful, Lord, my future's not set in concrete.

Because the cement is still wet,

I can lay to rest the markers of yesterday's grave mistakes

And focus on what I still may do.

Before I'm through with this season of my life,

I'm determined to be more reasonable with Christmas companions.

I vow to make up for the strife that I have caused

And beginning now to pause each day and love a Tiny Tim.

Thank you, Lord, for wet cement

And for the freedom that comes with starting again

Before all has started to set.

--Greg Asimakoupoulos

**Closing prayer:** *Almighty and Ever-gracious God, we confess that we have often been caught up in selfish pursuits, ignoring the needs of others and living as if You don't exist. Forgive us and have mercy on us. Let us alter our lives on the altar of Jesus' sacrifice for our sins. Alter our lives through the power of your Holy Spirit, so that we will pay attention to you, make the sacrifices necessary to know you, and start life anew as your followers each day. We ask this in the name of our Eternal Hope, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

## BENEDICTION

Lord, on this last Sunday of Advent, we are so glad for the good ending to your story. Your earthly birth, life and death wasn't in vain, because you live today so we might have hope, not only for eternity but for now. Through the Scriptures and through A Christmas Carol we've seen that good endings can be written to our own "Christmas Carol" by choosing to replace "humbug" with "hallelujah," "rubbish" with "rejoice." Thank you, Father, that's it's not too late to change the outcome of our holiday experience. By the time Christmas arrives in a few days, may our spirits be singing a personal "Hallelujah Chorus." We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Prince of Peace. Amen.

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[1]

quoted in Paul Lee Tan, Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations, Rockville, MD: Assurance Publishers, 1979,