

January 1, 2006

## Honoring Christmas in Your Heart All Year Long Luke 2:8-20

### INTRODUCTION

When Scrooge was transformed at Christmas it transformed his past, his present and his future. He became a man who truly knew the secret of Christmas all year long.

(SHOW VIDEO CLIP.)

Scrooge's conversion can best be understood as an expression of the fruit of salvation, not the root of salvation.

Scrooge shows us how the Spirit of Christ and the message of Christmas can and should change every aspect of life.

Scrooge had said, "I will honor Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the past, the present, and the future. The Spirits of all three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach."

- Just what does Scrooge mean when he says he will live in the lessons of the past, present and the future?
- How does he change from a humbug worldview to one of hallelujah?
- How can we keep the Christmas spirit alive?

You see, there's a problem with the Christmas spirit. Have you noticed how it fades? Like New Year's resolutions, the Christmas spirit is quickly forgotten as life returns to the routine.

Stuart Briscoe tells a story first told to him many years ago by an old German man. This man had fought with the German forces in the First World War. In those days, warfare was not high-tech but hand-to-hand trench warfare. Soldiers lived, fought, and died in trenches full of mud and blood and vermin. In those trenches, dug in the fields of France, enemies could actually hear each other talking. They didn't need satellites to locate targets. The enemy was just over there.

This old gentleman told Stuart how on one cold, moonlit Christmas Eve, he huddled in the bottom of the trench. Because of the annual Christmas truce, the fighting had stopped. Suddenly, from the British trenches a loud, sweet tenor voice began to sing "The Lord Is My Shepherd," and the music floated up into the clear, moonlit air.

Then he said something surprising: from the German trenches, a rich baritone voice joined in, singing "Der Herr Ist Mein Hirte." For a few moments, everybody in both trenches concentrated on the sound of these two invisible singers and the beautiful harmony. The British soldier and the German soldier sang praise to the Lord who was their shepherd. The singing stopped, and the sound slowly died away.

"We huddled in the bottom of our trenches and tried to keep warm until Christmas Day dawned," he said. "Early on Christmas morning, some of the British soldiers climbed out of their trenches into No Man's Land, carrying a football."

One soldier carried a round football (by which Stuart, a native of England, means what we in the United States call a soccer ball). These English soldiers started kicking around a football, in a pickup game in no man's land, between the trenches. Then the old man said, "Some of the German soldiers climbed out, and England played Germany at football in No Man's Land on Christmas Day, in the middle of the battlefield in France in the first World War." (England won.)

Then he said, "The next morning, the carnage began again, with machine guns and bayonet fighting. Everything was back to normal."<sup>[1]</sup>

## HONOR CHRISTMAS ALL YEAR LONG BY LETTING THE HALLELUJAH OF CHRIST'S BIRTH TOUCH EVERY ASPECT OF OUR LIVES.

### I. The Hallelujah Life Trusts God To Redeem The Past

As we have already seen, the past has tremendous power to shape our experience in the present. Too often we fail to realize, however, that the past need not control our lives. Unless we make conscious choices, we will likely remain captive to the wounds or regrets of the past.

#### A. *You can regret your past*

The humbug life lives in the land of regret, wallowing in the sadness of opportunities lost or mistakes made. We can keep the past alive by punishing ourselves with guilty feelings or grudges, with remorse or resentment. In short, we can allow the past to overpower the present. When we do, regret becomes a dull ache, flaring up at the most inconvenient times. We rob not only ourselves in every moment, but we rob the people around us through our preoccupation.

In the hallelujah life, however, the past is utilized to educate us, to train us. It is the means to expose our need, so we can find God's solution to that need. It exposes our weaknesses, so we find God's strength. The past cannot make things better, but it can be the catalyst that makes us seek better things.

#### B. *You can forget your past*

There are many who cope with life's hurts by choosing to live in the land of denial. They may anesthetize themselves with substances, activities, and/ or people. They may compartmentalize their lives in order to lessen the tension caused by their conflicting values and behavior. In the end, however, the dark forces control them. They greatly underestimate the power of the past to influence the present.

The hallelujah life however, understands that denial is never an answer. The Bible teaches us that the truth alone sets us free (John 8:32).

Those who forget their past lose one of the richest sources of energy, inspiration and instruction. They also lose their sense of need for God and the blessing of God's grace in their lives. Jesus came to deal with our past. That leads us to our third option.

#### C. *Or you can let God redeem your past by faith*

*God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin (1 John 1:5-7).*

The message of the angels to the shepherds in Luke 2:11 was that a Savior had been born to free people.

God redeems the past through forgiveness.

Tom Anderson for years lived under the shadow of a bitter memory. He had participated in a hazing ceremony in college that resulted in the death of a fellow student. He floundered from one job to another. He and his wife separated after six years of marriage. Then the news about Tom changed. He and his wife got back together; he earned a fine position in the business world. This was his explanation for the change:

I used to think, “Nothing can undo what I have done.” The thought of my guilt would stop me in the middle of a smile or a handshake. It put a wall between Betty (my wife) and me. Then I had an unexpected visit from the person I most dreaded to see--the mother of the college classmate who died.

“Years ago,” she said, “I found it in my heart, through prayer, to forgive you. Betty forgave you. So did your friends and employers.” She paused, and then said sternly, “You are the only person who hasn’t forgiven Tom Anderson. Who do you think you are to stand out against the people of the town and the Lord Almighty?”

I looked into her eyes and found there a kind of permission to be the person I might have been if her boy had lived. For the first time in my adult life I felt worthy to love and be loved. [2]

**What are you doing with your past? Have you moved from humbug to hallelujah by letting God redeem it?**

T.S. The hallelujah life also affects the way we live every day. So, like the spirits in *A Christmas Carol*, let me take you from the past to the present.

## **II. The Hallelujah Life Makes Christ The Priority Of The Present**

We serve a living God who longs to be actively involved in our lives every moment. But again, we can choose to lead a humbug life and shut him out. How do you deal with your present?

### ***A. You can follow your own desires***

Scrooge had done this to the ultimate degree. He had done whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted, no matter how it impacted others. It made him financially wealthy--but poor in every other way. Following our own desires may get us what we initially want, but it will leave us wanting in the end: wanting the things that matter most.

The hallelujah life puts our desires into perspective.

### ***B. You can let others control you***

There are some who are always thinking about what they have to do for others, or about what others expect of them, or about pleasing and performing for others. On the surface they may appear virtuous, but underneath they are often driven by fear and anxiety.

In the hallelujah life, we understand that while other people certainly have an important place in our lives, they are not meant to determine who we are and what we do.

We have another choice for dealing with the present.

### ***C. You can choose the freedom of serving Christ***

The good news is that the gospel sets us free from self-centeredness and from being controlled by others. How? By bringing us under Jesus’ lordship. We see this demonstrated by the shepherds as they respond to the message of the angels. When they heard the good news, they acted on it, going to see what God had done (Luke 2:15).

Like Paul’s admonition in Colossians 3:17, “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

✓ **We can learn to see God in the details of life, in the routine of life.**

- ✓ We can learn to see ourselves serving God as we serve others, and witnessing to God's love as we serve.

Instead of making a New Year's resolution this year, make a Hallelujah Faith Promise to the Lord. Ask him to guide your goals in a prayer like this: "Lord, with your help, this coming year I will \_\_\_\_\_." Then set a date for three months from now to see whether your hallelujah spirit is still thriving in that situation.

### III. The Hallelujah Life Follows Christ Boldly Into The Future

Lastly, the hallelujah life affects how we view the future.

#### A. You can ignore the future

Initially, Scrooge never thought about the future, except in material terms. He ignored the fact that there would be a day of reckoning. He ignored the fact that one day his worldly possessions would pass on to others--and those people may not be to his liking and may not use his good for purposes he would approve.

The hallelujah life understands the reality of consequences and learns to cultivate the eternal perspective on life.

*2 Cor 5:9-10*

*9 So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

There are those, however, who do not ignore the future, but think about it with great anxiety and apprehension.

#### B. You can worry about the future

I confess that this is where I am especially vulnerable. I am too often stuck on what's next and missing what's now!

The hallelujah life knows how to put the future in God's hands and receive today as a gift to be savored now. It knows that worry is not only ineffective in helping us tomorrow, but actually cheats us out of today.

#### C. Or you can anticipate the future in holy hope

The shepherds were given the promise of peace with the coming of Jesus. In spite of the present circumstances they announced that peace and lived in that hope (Luke 2:14-19). The hallelujah life sees beyond the problems of the present to the certain hope that awaits us in Christ.

### CONCLUSION

May the same be said of us. And even more--that we know how to honor Christ and bring God's blessing to every one. Jesus Christ redeems us, indwells us and leads us into life abundant and eternal with him. Hallelujah!

As you came in today you received a special Calendar. If you notice the 25<sup>th</sup> of every month is circled. This calendar is designed a reminder for each one of us to let the miracle of Christmas transform all aspects of our lives through out the coming year.

Perhaps you will use the calendar to record prayer requests. Maybe you will use it as a reminder

to spend time in His word. Maybe you will record promises of passages read. Let it be your journal of your personal journey of transformation you are embarking on in this coming year.

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[1]

(Stuart Briscoe, "Christmas 365 Days a Year," Preaching Today, Tape No. 135)

[2]