

From Humbug to Hallelujah

INTRO STORY: Late one Christmas Day, a resident of an upscale community of Hillsborough, CA accompanied by his wife and kids decided to bring some Christmas cheer to the neighborhood. They set out to go caroling house to house for their neighbors. As they were tuning up outside the house of their first stop, the lady of the house came to the door. She was visibly worried and said, “Look fella, I am too busy. The plumbing is in the fritz, and I can’t get anyone over here to fix it. Plus I have a mob coming over for dinner. If you feel like singing carols, go sing them to someone else!” As the man was still speaking, “Yes, ma’am” she closed the door in their face. Bing Crosby then turned to his family and headed elsewhere.

TRAN: It seems like anyone can get their inner Scrooge on when the stress of the holidays becomes overwhelming.

At this time of year, a classic tale that speaks to many is Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*. It is so well loved that it has been made into plays, musicals, movies, cartoons, and of course, the definitive version on film - *A Muppets Christmas Carol*.

- I. Most of us know the story: it is about a miserly business man’s transformation to the champion of Christmas
 - A. Ebenezer Scrooge has a dark heart which has no place for Christmas cheer
 1. His primary response when wished a “Merry Christmas,” is “Bah Humbug!”
 2. His focus is not on the charity of the holiday, but on acquiring wealth
 3. According to Dickens, Scrooge finds Christmas “a time for finding yourself another year older and not an hour richer.”
 - B. Let’s check in on Scrooge near the beginning of the story
 1. Scrooge’s nephew, Fred, is full of Christmas cheer
 2. In this scene, Fred walks into Scrooge’s office
 3. VIDEO:
 - a) Fred talks about keeping Christmas - meaning observing the holiday and participating in it’s meaning
 - (1) If you do a play on words, we don’t keep Christmas, we give Christmas away
 - (a) You celebrate it
 - (b) You forgive, observe charity,
 - (c) You open a closed heart to other people
 - (d) You worship the Christ child
 - b) Fred’s focus was not on money but on the meaning of Christmas

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- (1) He said, “though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in MY pocket, I believe it has done me good, and will do me good, and I say, ‘God bless it!’”
 - (2) Fred didn’t care about material things the way his uncle did
 - (a) Scrooge was seeking wealth and gain by working himself to death
 - (b) Fred cared more for the charity and wonder of the season
- II. Christmas, like many things in life are about time
- A. Scrooge had no time for Christmas
 1. He would rather remain dedicated to his task of making money than even take a day off
 2. Fred, of course, made time for Christmas and was blessed because of it
 - B. A missionary to Africa heard an observation from the Africans he ministered to about Americans
 1. Americans have watches, but Africans have time
 2. The point is that while we Americans have the technology to observe time, so we can cram more into our schedules
 3. Africans have time
 - a) Time to observe what is important
 - b) Time for people
 - c) Which translates into a better ability to focus on the here and now with people in need, the people they love
 - C. This is what we are talking about with Advent
 1. How do we make time for Christmas?
 2. The fact is that we need to learn how to “redeem our time” so there is room for Christ in our lives
 3. We need to turn our humbugs to hallelujahs
 - D. What are some of the forces that try to crowd out Christmas in our lives?
 1. Expectations
 - a) We have expectations all year long that can continue at Christmastime
 - (1) People expect you to be a certain way
 - (a) The perfect parent
 - (b) Or the perfect child
 - (c) Undo expectations to help extended family members
 - (2) Expectations to perform at a certain level - in school, or work, or life
 - (3) Expectations thrown on us by others
 - (4) Expectations thrown on us by ourselves
 - b) The list goes on

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2. Commercialism -
 - a) We often are frustrated over this one as believers
 - b) Santa crowds out Jesus
 - c) The presents around the tree crowd out the greatest gift ever given
 - d) The mad dash inside the stores, the expectation to find just the right present, all pushing out our focus on Christ
3. For some people, past hurts can make Christmas a less than happy day
 - a) It can be a reminder of a broken family
 - b) Or loved ones that are no longer with us
4. For others it is circumstances
 - a) Situations happening within your family
 - b) Work situations where the work gets demanding and dictate the priorities of your life
 - (1) There may be “push” times when job demands are high
 - (2) However, some time we use job as an excuse too
 - (3) Sometimes we are more like Scrooge than we might like to admit
- E. Fred understands the most important things in life - it is “not to make a living, but to make a life.”
 1. Words that are echoed in Scripture
 2. Turn to Ephesians 5:15-17 (p. 1176)
- F. Paul wants us to make the most of every opportunity because the days are evil
 1. Depending on your version, it may say, “redeeming the time because the days are evil.”
 - a) Not a bad translation because the Greek word used there does often mean redeem
 - b) However, because of its prefix in this verse, the idea is wider and more like the NIV version - “make the most of every opportunity
 2. SIDE BAR: I want to take you on a brief side bar, but it fits with this passage
 - a) There are five words in the Greek language that can be translated “time” in English
 - (1) Hemera - day
 - (2) Hora - hour
 - (3) Kairos - season
 - (4) Chronos - time
 - (5) Aion - age
 - b) The two words that are most important in this list are kairos and chronos - both are often translated with the generic word “time”

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- (1) Chronos is where we get our word for chronology - or an unfolding of events
- (2) Kairos is more like a moment that is more favorable than another time
 - (a) So Felix used this word speaking to Paul in Acts about hearing the gospel, “when it is convenient for me”
 - (b) Jesus used this word when referring to his “appointed time”
- c) Put all this together and we have making the most of every opportunity - or redeeming every opportunity
- d) Here is why I tell you all this sidebar on language
 - (1) First, if you have ever felt guilty about your use of time because the Bible says “redeeming the time” - and you are thinking each and every moment - that is not what Paul was referring to
 - (a) He is referring to using the opportunities for God’s glory
 - (b) As you are going through life, you are looking for opportunities to make the most of, or redeem, because the days are evil
 - (c) This is not a verse directing you to use all of your time toward ministry, but similar in thought to Matthew 28:19-20 about going and making disciples - it is “as you are going”
 - (d) Here it is as you have opportunities
 - (e) Becoming attune to those opportunities is another sermon entirely
 - (2) The second reason I tell you this is because it is possible to do the studies and understand these things for yourself
 - (a) There are simple ways and books that do not cost that much that can aid you in finding this information
 - (b) You don’t have to know Greek or Hebrew either
 - (c) But you can find what the original words meant, and understand that many times a generic word gets used in English when the original word is much more precise
3. Now, back to the verse: “Making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil”
 - a) Allow me to put this another way
 - b) “The greatest use of time is to spend it for something that will outlast it.”
4. Now, off the side bar and back to the point of why it is important to be making the most of every opportunity
 - a) At Christmas it is completely possible to be side tracked by many of the things that crowd out Christmas

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- b) If you remember the Christmas story from scripture, there were so many people around the family because of the census
 - (1) Yet they were so busy that they did not recognize Christ
 - (2) And we too can become so busy that we don't make room for Christ in our lives
- III. The work that we do in our lives, be it our jobs, or other things we work at in life, is not necessarily the problem
 - A. We have talked about this in the past, work is actually a good thing
 - 1. Work is challenging, provides us with needed amounts of stress
 - a) You do know that there is an optimal amount of stress required in every person's life
 - b) It is equally as damaging to the body to be under too little stress as too much stress
 - c) Right now I am sure all those under too much stress are shaking their heads in disbelief - but it is true
 - 2. But work that consumes us, like Scrooge, work that rules us instead of us ruling it, work that keeps us from other obligations such as family, friends, and wears on our health, and spiritual life, is wrong and sinful
 - 3. Jesus told us what is most important for followers of Christ
 - a) Matthew 6:33 "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."
 - b) While work is needed, and even is a form of worship to the Lord, the kingdom of Christ is always first in our sight
 - B. So we need to be work lovers, not work addicts
 - 1. Scrooge was hands down a work addict
 - a) He was trying to fill holes in his life with work
 - b) He was trying to minister to hurts and pains from the past by work and seeking wealth
 - 2. Mark Twain once said that he never did a "lick of work" in over 50 years
 - a) "I have always been able to gain my living without doing any work; for the writing of books and magazines was always play, not work. I enjoyed it."
 - b) Mark Twain was a work lover
 - c) He found great satisfaction in his work because it was like play to him
 - 3. Work lovers, they can stop play any time
 - 4. Work addicts often cannot enjoy play
 - a) They have to keep working
 - b) Maybe to please others
 - c) Maybe to have others like them - but they have to keep at it

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- d) They are usually working to fill a void
- 5. Did you know you can be a work addict even if you don't have a job
 - a) Let's take homemaker for example
 - (1) Homemakers can be perfectionists - feeling like the house must be spotless
 - (2) They can drive others in the house crazy with this perfectionistic attitude
 - (3) It can be the way that they get validation for their work - everyone notices and everyone likes them
 - b) Work addicts are even found in the church
 - (1) Many pastors do not know how to say "no" or set boundaries
 - (2) They exchange family life for ministry because "This is for God" and they fail to see that a healthy family is for God as well
- IV. This is the first Sunday in Advent, so what this message is really about is learning how to slow down, take off the watch we too often live by, and examine our lives
 - A. Being a work addict is a spiritual problem
 - 1. The Bible describes a person that if filled with the Spirit as "self-controlled"
 - 2. That cuts across the grain of what God has designed us, and asked us to be
 - 3. A work addict is out of control - at least when it comes to work
 - 4. They are not controlling that area of life - it is controlling them
 - B. The best example we have in Scripture of a life of balance between work, faith, and relationships is Jesus Himself
 - 1. Jesus was fully human and subject to all the forces of a sinful world
 - a) So Jesus became tired
 - b) Jesus had temptations of mixing up priorities
 - c) And let's face it, His work was the most important work in the history of the world
 - (1) Healing
 - (2) Proclaiming the kingdom
 - (3) Redeeming sinful humanity
 - 2. Yet Jesus life still demonstrated balance
 - a) When Jesus was young, he most likely held a trade of being a carpenter
 - b) Jesus enjoyed hospitality and intimate conversation with people
 - c) He traveled, studied, taught and prayed
 - d) He even went to parties!

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3. Jesus also recognized when he was so tired that he needed to stop giving out in ministry to spend time alone with His Father
 - a) If you remember the story of the feeding of the 5000
 - (1) Jesus does an incredible miracle in taking 5 loaves and 2 fish and breaking them to feed a crowd of 5000 men - not counting women and kids
 - (2) What is interesting is what the verses just after the miracle say “Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead...while he dismissed the crowd.”
 - (3) Matt. 14:23 “After He dismissed them, He went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.”
 - b) Jesus understood that He needed time of refreshment that only comes from being with His Father
 - (1) After a long time of ministry, doing things for the kingdom, Jesus knew He needed that time to recharge
 - (2) So He withdrew from all people to take that time
4. He balanced Himself between work, and not just any work, kingdom work, God’s work
 - a) That’s a snazzy way of elevating its importance
 - b) Its kingdom work!
 - c) He balanced between work and time to be refreshed with God
- C. So as we prepare to have a great Advent season, playfully the best Advent season we have known for a while, God invites you to observe balance in your life and find refreshment in Him
 1. Matthew 11:28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”
 - a) Is that not awesome!
 - b) God wants to give us the rest we need - the break we need at this crazy time of the year
 2. It gets better, Matthew 11:29-30 “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”
 - a) When we seek during this time of Advent to be taught by Christ, we find rest for our souls
 - b) The burden of work, or commercialism, or hurts or circumstances is too heavy
 - (1) We have been carrying that burden so long that we don’t realize there is a whole way of living life that is freeing
 - (2) And that way is through deeper relationship with Christ

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- V. So how do we redeem this time at Advent and make room for God's refreshment at Christmas?
 - A. First, choose to control your schedule
 - 1. Build in time to be frivolous with your time - especially with your loved ones
 - a) Plan a day to look at lights
 - b) Go spend time with an old friend over lunch that you don't see often
 - c) Plan a day with your family where you have nothing planned - just a day to unplug and have no requirements on the time schedule
 - 2. Read to draw inspiration at Christmas
 - a) Read the Christmas stories in the Bible
 - b) Read Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*
 - (1) Or watch it on video
 - (2) Watch a couple versions and compare
 - (3) Let the timeless lessons Dickens writes about speak to your heart
 - 3. Pick up a devotional calendar *From Humbug to Hallelujah* downstairs and use it as a family
 - a) They have multiple ideas for doing small family things to draw your hearts back to Christ
 - b) These things need not be all day productions
 - c) 10-20 minutes to re-center your hearts on Jesus, and your relationship with Him
 - B. I implore you to take the time in the next four weeks to learn from God's Word, and from Dickens' classic story
 - 1. As a church family, we want to change the humbugs that creep into our lives
 - 2. Into the hallelujahs with which we can praise God