

From Humbug to Hallelujah - The Value of Relationships

INTRO: Many of us, especially believers in Christ, bemoan the commercialism this time of year brings. The typical motto of this time of year is “spend, spend spend!” If you have ever heard of the *Robb Report* magazine, they create a list of some of the most extravagant gifts one can give at this time of year. In the past, if you are into sweet treats, there was a trip to NY to hang for a full day, see the behind-the-scenes operations of a famous chef’s restaurant, and a year’s worth of his secret dessert for a mere \$250,000. Or if that doesn’t tickle your fancy, how about your own private island? You might want to go in on this with some family or close friends. Unless, of course, you have an extra \$175 million laying around.

TRAN: Gifts like that may seem a bit absurd to the rest of us regular folk, but sadly, too many people look to things to bring them happiness. Even when we get the “ultimate gift” we often find true happiness eludes us.

Today as we check in on Ebenezer Scrooge, we see that he is being shown the immediate consequences of giving too little. And that really should be our complaint about giving at Christmas - not that we give too much, but that we give too little of the right gifts to those that need them. Scrooge will soon realize that true riches are not found in stingy accumulation of wealth, but in the extravagant investment of love. This is not the love we often see defined in culture of the warm fuzzies. Nothing wrong with warm fuzzies, but I think God had something more in mind when He said “God so loved the world that He gave his only Son.” There is something more about love we are meant to understand.

- I. An excellent definition of love is found in the Bible in Philippians 2:1-4 (p. 1179)
 - A. The definition is in verse 3 - “value others above yourself”
 - B. This is actually a good Christmas text if we read on
 1. Verses 6-8
 2. This is why Jesus came to earth in the first place
 3. Jesus laid aside His heavenly glory, the place that was rightfully His, and was born as a man into a sinful world
 4. Not only that, but He humbled Himself to die the most horrific of deaths - death on the cross
 - C. This is a great definition of love
 1. There are hardly any warm fuzzies here - soft music, candle lights, none of that
 2. Love is treating other people as more important than yourself
 3. And Christ at Christmas is our perfect example

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- II. Scrooge doesn't get this - He is in his own personal prison because he doesn't understand godly love
 - A. We pick up Scrooge's story as he is now visited by the ghost of Christmas Present
 - B. This ghost comes to reveal the poverty in Scrooge's heart
 - 1. He reveals how cold Scrooge has become
 - 2. He also reveals the treasures of real love
 - 3. To do this, the ghost of Christmas Present takes Scrooge to the home of his clerk, Bob Cratchit
 - 4. VIDEO
- III. The depths of the coldness of Scrooge's heart
 - A. As Scrooge watches over the scene in the Cratchit household, we can see him warming to the love and relationships on display
 - 1. Who wouldn't warm up watching one of Bob Cratchit's daughters surprise him when he came home
 - 2. Or seeing the love between Tiny Tim and his father
 - 3. Or when Bob compliments his wife by saying the pudding was the greatest accomplishment since marrying him
 - 4. You could feel the love in the room of the Cratchit household
 - B. Eventually, Scrooge asks a question about the sickly Tiny Tim
 - 1. The ghost replies that if the current course is not altered, Tim will die
 - 2. Scrooge objects, desperately wanting Tim to be spared
 - 3. Then the ghost reminds Scrooge of his own cold words from an encounter previously that day, when two men came looking for a donation for the poor
 - a) In talking with the men Scrooge asks, Are there no prisons? And the workhouses? Are they not in operation?
 - b) One of the men replied, "Many can't go there; and many would rather die."
 - c) Then Scrooge utters the line that the ghost reminds him of, "If he is likely to die he had better do it and decrease the excess population."
 - C. Without a doubt we are seeing the depths of Scrooge's cold heart
 - 1. His "Bah Humbug!" attitude of decreasing the excess population shows a huge lack of understanding about how precious each life is
 - a) Think about this, Joseph and Mary, they would have been among that excess population Scrooge was talking about
 - (1) Joseph was away from his trade in Nazareth
 - (2) It's not like he had paid vacation time saved up

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- (3) You worked your trade to make a living - what little you had went into travel that the government or your faith told you you must do
- (4) They wouldn't have medical insurance, or sick days to care for Mary
- b) Within the first two years Joseph and Mary became refugees
 - (1) King Herod tried to kill all the children under the age of two years old
 - (2) They grabbed everything they could carry and made a run for it
 - (3) Scholars believe the family put to use immediately the gold the wise men brought
- c) What do you think? Would Scrooge have let them die if they knocked on his door looking for a place to stay in Bethlehem?
2. Scrooge didn't understand that the poor can be wealthy
 - a) Tiny Tim is the perfect example
 - (1) His body is small and frail - broken in many ways
 - (2) Yet his spirit is strong and whole
 - (3) He may not have lots of things, Tim is rich in the things that matter
 - (a) Like faith
 - (b) Like love
 - (c) Like relationships
 - b) You can almost see the frailty of Tim as the frailty of the newborn Jesus
 - (1) He is vulnerable to the world
 - (2) Yet with unmistakable voice Jesus has arrived to bless every one of us
3. Scrooge also did not understand that the wealthy can be poor
 - a) He completely missed his own crippled spirit
 - b) He is unable to walk in love, to enjoy relationships because of his blindness
- D. We further see Scrooge's deficiency in the scene with his family
 1. Scrooge's nephew and niece discuss Scrooge - about how rich he is in wealth and poor of spirit
 2. Fred goes on to say that the consequence of Scrooge shunning the family really goes to hurt Scrooge
 3. At this time of year, let's be honest, family can be a touchy subject
 - a) Some of us may have wonderful families and we are happy to be with them at Christmas

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- b) Some may have families that it is the biggest chore to be with them at Christmas
 - c) My guess is that most of us land somewhere in the middle
 - d) Take this “Peanuts” cartoon for example
 - (1) Display Cartoon
 - (2) We all have imperfect family, and we are imperfect family as well
 - (3) We probably all have moments where they are bugable or huggable - and we may be the same way
 - (4) But without those people in our lives, we know that something would be very wrong
4. Scrooge, sadly has not even had the opportunity to come to understand the beauty of these relationships he is missing out on
- a) There was a man named George Mason, whose life centered on his business. He lived alone, and on one particular Christmas he had refused all invitations.
 - b) Late on Christmas Eve night he stepped into the office vault. The hinges of the door had been oiled recently, so without a sound, the vault door close behind him.
 - c) He pounded on the door, but to no avail. Even the cleaning woman was gone because it was Christmas Eve. At first he thought he could make it overnight until the sudden realization that no one would be in tomorrow - it was Christmas Day.
 - d) As he sunk to the ground, he was relieved to feel a safety hole at the back of the vault in which he could feel some air coming in.
 - e) The rest of Christmas Eve passed and so did Christmas Day. He was alone - as he had planned. But he was uncomfortable, and thirsty, and hungry in a darkness so dense he could feel it to core of his being
 - f) He tried to sleep to pass the time. He thought of friends, family and how they might be enjoying Christmas. He wondered if he was missed.
 - g) The day after Christmas someone arrived early and unlocked the vault. Unnoticed, George mason staggered out and over to the water cooler. He stepped outside, hailed a taxi and went home to freshen up. Then back to the office and no one would ever know.
 - h) He was physically absent from Christmas, but no friends or family gave him a second thought. So in a way he didn’t miss anything. After that lonely experience he wrote these words on a card, “To love people, to be indispensable, somewhere: that is the purpose of life. That is the secret to happiness.”

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- i) He then taped the card to a wall high up in the vault to always remind himself of what had been missed.
 5. Scrooge was just now beginning to see that he was being missed from the life of the family - even if he thought the family and Christmas to be humbug
- IV. True riches of Christmas are found in relationships
- A. We read the verses earlier from Philippians, “value others above yourself.”
 - B. We see this happen in the Christmas story - Matthew 1:18-25
 1. Joseph demonstrates the riches of relationships by putting his love for Mary and his love for the Lord first
 - a) Joseph chose to love both the Lord and Mary by not taking the easy way out and divorcing Mary
 - (1) The circumstances certainly would lead many to head that way
 - (2) Joseph, being a righteous man had thoughts of a quiet divorce
 - (3) But he was willing to follow the Lord’s command in spite of the circumstances
 - b) Joseph is being asked to accept circumstances that none of us have had to face
 - (1) He was to take Mary as his wife and accept that the child was from God
 - (2) He was to care for this child as his own - even as his firstborn, favored son
 - (3) He had to endure the embarrassment, questions, and uncertainties all of this brought
 - (4) This may have had an impact on his vocation
 - (a) When Joseph and Mary came to offer their sacrifice at the temple, they offered the least expensive offering
 - (b) It lends itself to the idea that they were not wealthy
 2. Joseph also submitted himself to God’s plan, displaying his love for the Lord
 - a) He became a partner with God to help usher in the Savior of the world
 - b) I’m going to read you a quote about being partners with God. It is specifically about being in ministry, but I think it applies well
 - c) This comes from a man named Forbes Robinson
 - d) “I think I have told you of my father's words spoken during his last illness: "If I had a thousand lives I would give them all, all to the ministry." You will not regret your decision. If angels could envy, how they would envy us our splendid chance, to be able, in a world

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where everything unseen must be taken on sheer faith, in a world where the contest between the flesh and the spirit is being decided for the universe, not only to win the battle ourselves but also to win it for others! To help a brother up the mountain while you yourself are only just able to keep your foothold, to struggle through the mist together, that surely is better than to stand at the summit and beckon.”

- e) Joseph submitted his life for the plan of God, putting the Lord’s will, Mary, and this unborn baby ahead of himself
 - (1) The quote said “If I had a thousand lives I would give them all”
 - (2) Would you give a thousand lives to follow Christ?
 - (3) What kind of a price can you put on living in relationship with the Almighty Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, and with His Son, Jesus Christ?
 - (4) There is no greater blessing than putting Christ first in your life
- C. Scrooge is slowly finding out that people are the richest blessing one can have in their life
 - 1. This time of year wealth, and materialism are the things at the forefront of people’s minds
 - a) Some because they want more stuff
 - b) Some because they don’t have much, and feel they want to give more
 - (1) Not necessarily a bad thing
 - (2) Depending on how it is applied
 - 2. What would happen if we put relationships at the front of our minds
 - a) Thomas Carlyle had married his secretary, whom he dearly loved. But he was absorbed in his own interests and activities, treating his wife as if she were still his employee.
 - b) Stricken with cancer, she was confined to bed for a long time before she died. After her funeral, Carlyle went back to his empty house. Disconsolate and grieving, he wandered around downstairs thinking about the woman he had loved. After a while, he went upstairs to her room and sat down in the chair beside the bed on which she had been dying for months. He realized with painful regret that he had not sat there very often during her long illness.
 - c) He noticed her diary. While she was alive, he never would have read it, but now that she was gone he felt free to pick it up and thumb through its pages. One entry caught his eye: “Yesterday he spent an hour with me, and it was like being in heaven. I love him so much.” He turned a few more pages and read, "I listened all day to hear his steps in the hallway. And now it's late. I guess he won't come to see

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me." Carlyle read a few more entries and then threw the book on the floor, rushing out through the rain back to the cemetery. He fell on his wife's grave in the mud, sobbing, "If only I had known . . . if only I had known."

- d) We have the opportunity this Christmas to make relationships a priority
 - (1) To spend the time with people that we love, and maybe don't spend enough time with
 - (2) To spend time with people that need love more than we realize
 - (3) To spend time with people that are starving for relationships
- D. God may have given you a story in life that you can share with others and help them in their difficulties
 - 1. Turn to 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 (p. 1157)
 - 2. This is Tiny Tim in a nutshell
 - a) Remember what he said, "I hope that the people saw me in church, because I was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day who made lame beggars walk and blind men see."
 - b) Tiny Tim took what could be, for many of us, a humbug of life and turned it into a hallelujah
 - c) Jenny Hiltz is one that has a similar attitude about all the physical problems she has had
 - (1) She continues to praise her Savior
 - (2) She looks for ways in which she can be an encouragement to others
- V. So how do we apply all of this for our Christmas this year?
 - A. Take a relationship inventory
 - 1. Who have you invested in? Where have you neglected to invest?
 - 2. The Bible says when it comes to debt, there is only one good kind of debt: "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law." - Romans 13:8
 - 3. Have you been making payments on this debt?
 - B. Take a family picture, and pray over it
 - 1. Thank God for the people in that picture
 - 2. Thank God for the positive things that have happened this year
 - 3. Offer God any sadness and pain or disappointments or regrets
 - 4. Ask God to help you make this the richest Christmas you can remember

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- C. How about investing in relationships with people that cannot do for themselves
 - 1. Whether that is giving to those in need
 - a) If you know a family that could use a good Christmas, maybe you forego your Christmas and buy presents for them
 - b) Or you invite them to your house for Christmas
 - 2. You could also help someone that cannot clean or fix up their own home
 - a) Find out the need and do what you can
 - b) If they need work done on the house get some people together to help out
 - 3. Or just go and visit some folks that maybe can't get out - their families have kind of left them by themselves
 - a) Maybe a friend or neighbor
- D. We do this so we can be a blessing to others, and so we can keep relationships a prized part of the Christmas season
 - 1. I end by telling you I had a chance to practice what I preached last week
 - 2. I met a man as I was traveling to Mom's house that needed help
 - a) I was in a position to give him the kind of help he needed
 - b) He was so grateful he had tears in his eyes, and jumped up hugging me like I was a long lost grandson
 - 3. It was a relational connection that brought him joy - and a moment that he really needed
- E. We can do amazing things, just by listening to God, and making connections with people
 - 1. Sounds familiar
 - 2. Love God, and love others
 - 3. The two most important relationship you will ever have