

From Humbug to Hallelujah - Reawakening the Joy Inherent in Christmas

INTRO: There was a small country church having a yearly cantata. Part of their tradition was that they would march in singing, “O Come All Ye Faithful.” Now this church had a large floor furnace, and the grating for the furnace went right up the center aisle.

As the choir began to process in, they march up the aisle with precision, each person three pews behind the other. Just as the last alto got midway up the aisle, she stepped on the grating of the floor furnace. Unfortunately, her pencil thin heel went into the grate and got stuck. She shook her foot hard several times, but to no avail. The man behind her in line was getting close, so she slipped her foot out of her shoe and limped the rest of the way to the stage.

The man coming behind her looked down and realized what happened. He knew that if the shoe was left sticking in the grate, it could interfere with the rest of the procession. Thinking and acting quickly, he reached down, gave the shoe a quick twist and yank. Sure enough, the entire floor grate came up in his hands along with the shoe. He was in a mild state of shock and dazedly marched up the aisle along with the music, shoe and floor grate in hand.

You can probably guess what happened next. The next man in line fell into the hole.

TRAN: There are few seasons of the year that trigger memories like Christmas does. One of my favorite memories of Christmas growing up was with our family pet, our dog named Sloopy. Sloopy was a dachshund. Each Christmas he knew which present was his, and watched mom put it under the tree. He never bothered his present. He just left it there undisturbed. On Christmas Eve we would go out to my aunt’s house and my grandma’s house to celebrate. Then we would return home for our family Christmas. We must have always been one of Santa’s first stops because he had always been there when we got home. Upon arrival, Sloopy would get excited, like dogs do when you come home, and then he would run for the tree. He would get his present and only his present out from under the tree, tear open the paper and proceed to tear the eyes out of his new stuffed animal.

I. Humbug to Hallelujah

- A. Our series is on moving from humbug to hallelujah
- B. The reality is that not everyone has great memories of Christmas
 1. Some of us have past hurtful experiences - maybe with family, or friends
 2. Many have lost loved ones that they miss at this special time of year
 3. Some have lost jobs that made the holiday slim pick’n’s
- C. As we continue this series, we are ready to take a look at some of the hard things about Christmas

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1. Christmas is not all lights and smiles and sugar plum fairies dancing in our heads
- D. Last week we looked at the chains that can hold us
 1. We saw that Christ is the One that can break those chains
 2. It is his birth that makes all the difference at this time of year
- E. Today we want to look at past experiences, with the help of Scrooge, that may affect our ability to shout hallelujah this Christmas
- F. If you remember the story, Marley appears to Scrooge to warn him that the consequences of his “humbug” life were more serious than he realized
 1. Marley told Scrooge he would be visited by three ghosts as Christmas Day approached
 2. The first spirit would come when the clock tolls one
 3. He added, “without their visit you cannot hope to shun the path I tread”
- G. When Marley’s ghost disappears, Scrooge dismisses the encounter as “humbug” and goes to bed
 1. At one o’clock, sure enough, the Ghost of Christmas Past pays Scrooge a visit
 2. As the ghost took Scrooge to visit HIS past, I invite you to take a walk down your memory lane
- II. What we are doing is going back to some of the experiences that shaped us
 - A. In the tale, the spirit takes Scrooge to five scenes from his past, growing up as a boy, into young adulthood
 1. These scenes stir up Scrooge’s emotions, both sadness and joy
 2. These scenes also give us a glimpse into what has shaped Scrooge into the man that we see in the story
 - B. The first thing we see from Scrooge’s encounter with the Ghost of Christmas Past is we can often be robbed of our joy by the memory of wounds we’ve received
 1. Scrooge’s past opens with us realizing that young Scrooge did not have many friends
 - a) As many others from his boarding school were merry at Christmastime, singing songs as they hung out with friends, young Scrooge is by the fireplace with his dearest friends - the characters of the books he loved so well
 - b) No doubt, having few friends at such a tender young age wounded Scrooge in ways not completely understood
 - c) As Scrooge saw his younger self, he sat and wept at the scene
 2. Next we see Scrooge a little older in the same room, pacing nervously

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- a) In walks a girl a little younger than himself who throws her arms around him, kisses him, and says, “Dear, dear brother.”
 - b) It is his sister, Fan
 - c) She has come to bring Scrooge home
 - (1) Here is where we get yet a deeper look at Scrooge’s wounded soul
 - (2) Dickens does not say it directly, but Fan’s words tell us all we need to know, “Father is so much kinder than he used to be, that home’s like heaven! He spoke so gently to me the other night when I was going to bed, that I was not afraid to ask him once more if you might come home; and he said ‘yes, you should’”
 - (3) Fan even promises that Scrooge never has to come back to this boarding school - they will be able to spend all of their Christmas’ together
 - d) What we see is that Scrooge, for whatever the reason was not welcome at home
 - e) Not everyone has a happy childhood
 - (1) This summer we went to serve in TN at a home for kids that could not be in their home with their parents for any number of reasons
 - (2) I read the following story, and it reminded me of these kids
 - (a) At a different facility than the one we went to called St. Jude’s Ranch, a little girl excitedly got Christmas presents for her family, and wrapped each one with love and care, mailing them to her family
 - (b) She was so excited to get a box back in the mail!
 - (c) She held this box until Christmas Day
 - (d) When she opened it she found the presents she mailed to her family - unopened
 - (3) We are beginning to see this is the type of childhood Scrooge had
3. Perhaps the deepest of wounds was only hinted at by Dickens in the briefest of manners
- a) His loving, younger sister died, leaving behind one son, Fred whom we met the first week
 - b) The story may imply that she died giving birth to Fred
 - c) The one person that truly loved and cared for Scrooge in his family was taken from him
 - d) The roots of “humbug-itis” are often found in rejection and lost love
- C. The other two scenes from Scrooge’s past remind us that we can be robbed of joy by the choices we have made

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1. Many of us remember the exchange between Scrooge and his fiancée, Belle
 2. She is in tears as they discuss how she has been replaced in Scrooge's heart by another love
 3. Scrooge doesn't understand
 4. She goes on to explain that a golden idol has replaced her in his heart - his love for money and gain
 5. Scrooge protests that he has never tried to get be released from their commitment to marry
 6. She then explains that they were different people when they met - content with their economic level
 7. She even asks him if he would seek her out to marry her now - and Scrooge without a word, concedes the point that he would not
 8. She continues to prove her point that gain is the love Scrooge has chosen
 - a) In two brief sentences Belle tells Scrooge that He is released
 - b) In the next she hopes that he has some pain over this (which would show he actually cared) and then she utters the famous words, "I hope that you will be happy in the life you have chosen"
 9. Scrooge had an idol in his heart that drove the two of them apart
 - a) He chose to deal with his wounds through continued ambition and materialism which shows in the next scene
 10. The final scene is one of a family that is having a great time
 - a) There is dancing, and merriment of all kinds
 - b) It shows the father coming home with presents for his children
 - c) It displays the deep love one of his daughters has for her dad
 - d) Then the husband says to his wife, Belle, that he ran across one of Belle's old friends - Mr. Scrooge
 - e) He goes on to tell her that he saw Mr. Scrooge in his office at work, alone as his partner Jacob Marley lies on his death bed
 - f) Again, Scrooge made choices that caused him to be alone in the world
 - (1) He chose material goods over love
 - (2) He chose money and wealth over relationship
- D. At this time of year we may find that we have been robbed of our joy by the memories of old wounds we received
1. Maybe by family members
 2. Maybe by friends, coworkers, even fellow Christians
- E. Or you have been robbed of joy by choices you made
1. You chose something over joy

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2. You chose something less than the joy God offers
- F. How do we respond when we find ourselves at this crossroad?
 1. You can work harder at fixing things
 2. You can try to avoid the unpleasantness that comes with these things
 3. You can throw up your arms and resign yourself that things are hopeless
 4. OR, you can allow God touch these memories, these wounds and heal them, and even make them sources of strength
 5. Scrooge chose to “extinguish” the truth and bury these memories, but there is a better way to handle them
- III. Even though we have a past, even though we can remember hurts and wounds we might have sustained, we can still choose joy
 - A. Even for Scrooge, the past was not all dark and gloomy - the Ghost of Christmas Past showed him one memory of joy and the hope of future promise
 1. It is a memory of Old Fezziwig’s Christmas party
 2. It is a memory that showed Scrooge the alternative to riches an alternative of a life of love and joy
 - B. VIDEO: Clip of Fezziwig’s party
 1. If you know the story, Fezziwig is not a wealthy man
 - a) He was not hurting, but he did not have money to waste either
 - b) Dickens never tells us that the work was complete so the party could begin
 - (1) He probably had struggles just like anyone
 - (2) And like anyone, the work never seems to end, there is always more to do
 2. But Fezziwig knew how important it is to celebrate
 - a) He closed up the shop
 - b) And announced, “Let the dance begin”
 - C. Joy is a big part of Christmas
 1. Luke 2:8-14 (p. 1027)
 2. Christ’s coming is joy to the world
 3. We need to learn to focus on our joys and blessings in Christ
 4. When we do, our humbugs turn to hallelujahs
 5. When we celebrate, when we keep Christ at the front, the joy He brings, and we realize
 - a) We are never alone
 - b) We are never rejected
 - c) The God’s love can heal the wounds and the hurts of yesterday

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- (1) Do you remember the little girl from St. Jude's Ranch that received her presents back in the mail?
 - (2) She learned that Jesus loved her through the love and support of her St. Jude family
 - (a) Which is a great lesson right there
 - (b) Your Christian family, your church family, can sometimes step in to help with the healing process when your real family has stepped out
 - (c) That is why we need to keep a family mentality around here for our church - we are a family, brought together by Christ
 - (3) This little girl, thanks to her surrogate family was able to trust again, was able to forgive her family
 - (4) She learned to laugh, and through Christ, grew to become a happy, healthy woman
 6. When we are able to turn outside ourselves to the One who loves us greatly
 - a) The One who came into the world with good news of great joy
 - b) That is when we too are able to learn, and grow and heal
 7. Realize it or not, Fezziwig may have known more about the heart of God than we realize
 - a) He drew Scrooge into a loving, joyful family
 - b) And for Scrooge, this was a memory worth reliving
- IV. How can we cultivate joy in our lives
- A. I would suggest that you sit down and take some time to write out all of the "God moments" of the past year in your life
1. Answered prayers
 2. Times of God's blessing
 3. Times of growth
 4. Even times of difficulty and pain - knowing that God brought you through
 5. Or how about people God has brought into your life to make a difference - like Fezziwig was to Scrooge
 6. ILL: An exercise that I have undertaken is to journal once a week and simply answer the question, "What is God trying to teach me this week?"
 - a) This forces me to review my week, and look for moments where God was directing my paths
 - b) I makes me look for lessons that I might not have known were there

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- c) While I am sure that I probably miss some, or even many of the things God is trying to teach me, it helps to understand some of the things
- d) And it is just once a week - take a little extra time to review what God is saying
- B. The Advent calendar (which hopefully you all have and are following along in) suggests this:
 - 1. Scrooge had Fezziwig, and the memory of the parties that bring to mind the ideas of community and acceptance
 - 2. Maybe you need a “dance partner” to help you relive, or make new memories of your own
 - a) Memories of the joy of your salvation
 - b) After David bombed in life big time by committing adultery with Bathsheba and having her husband killed
 - (1) Psalm 51 records David’s prayer
 - (2) Psalm 51:10-12 “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”
 - (a) Maybe you feel like David
 - (b) The joy of your salvation has worn away
 - (c) You know you should be excited for your salvation and the things of God, but you just can’t muster it up
 - (d) Maybe this needs to be your prayer - “restore to me, the joy of your salvation”
 - c) I would suggest that you find a “dance partner”
 - (1) Someone that is in love with Jesus, is excited about the salvation God has granted them
 - (2) Many times joy is caught, not taught so get around someone that can lead you in the dance
- C. Another way to help restore your joy is to remember others that are less fortunate than you
 - 1. Do something unexpected to bring them joy
 - 2. Kurt Warner was a QB in the NFL - he kind of came out of nowhere and won the Super Bowl in 2000
 - a) He is a devout Christian
 - b) I read an article about he and his family and a practice they share

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- (1) In an effort to teach his kids about the advantages they have, whenever they would go out to eat, they would, as a family, choose another family in the restaurant to bless
 - (2) Usually someone that looked stressed or down on their luck, or in need of a little joy
 - (3) Then the Warner family would ask to pay the bill for that family anonymously
3. Last I checked, none of us signed multi-million dollar contracts for professional sports teams
- a) So if you want to use this idea you are welcome to, but I understand that the Warners have more resources than most
4. But in the same spirit, do something unexpected for someone else
5. I'll give you this last thing, not to make me sound amazing, but to point out the joy you can bring
- a) I was in a restaurant in Indy one time, and as I entered there was a man, begging near the entrance
 - b) After sitting down, I felt like God wanted me to do something for him
 - (1) I make it a practice not to give money if at all possible so I wondered a little how I could help
 - (2) I could not shake the feeling that I needed to give him a meal
 - (3) And not just the leftovers or something small, but a full meal
 - (4) So I spoke with my server and set things up to take a full meal for him when I left
 - c) Not only did it help him, and bring joy to he and myself, it brought joy to the server
 - (1) She could not believe that someone would do something like that
 - (2) Not to aggrandize myself - I was simply being obedient in that moment
- D. These are all things you can do to be cultivating joy in your heart, and in the heart's of those around you.