

December 10, 2017

Christmas Goes to the Movies

A Christmas Carol

"It's Time for a Change"

Romans 12:1-2

Opening words: According to Wikipedia, over one hundred Christmas movies have been made through the years. Each one is not considered a classic. Have you ever seen *Santa Claus and the Ice Cream Bunny* or *Star Wars Holiday Special*? Those are considered two of the worst Christmas movies ever made. However, there are other movies that are considered classics. It is those movies we are looking at in this sermon series, *Christmas Goes to the Movies*. You remember my task. We are uncovering the divine truth found in six classic Christmas movies. We began two weeks ago. To date, we have looked at *Christmas Vacation* and *It's a Wonderful Life*. In the next two weeks, we are going to look at *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, and *Elf*. On Christmas Eve we will look at *Home Alone*. Today's movie is *A Christmas Carol*. How many times have you watched it? How many versions have you seen of *A Christmas Carol*?

A Christmas Carol was written by Charles Dickens (1812-1870), who had a heart for the poor, in 1843. History tells us the book was an instant hit. Before long it made it to the stage, and in time, film. Through the years, forty-four different films have been made based on *A Christmas Carol*. On that list is *Mister Magoo's Christmas Carol* and *The Flintstones Christmas Carol*. My favorite is the 1951, *A Christmas Carol* starring Alastair Sim, as Scrooge. Our scripture reading for today is Romans 12:1-2. Let me call this message *It's Time for a Change*.

Romans 12:1-2 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

George Bernard Shaw once said, "*Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.*" How many people do you know who refuse to change? If that makes you think, say, "**Bah Humbug!**"

His name was Ebenezer Scrooge. He was the sole owner of the profitable business, Marley and Scrooge. He sees himself as a good man of business. All he cares about is money and profit. Human need is of no concern to him, so he rejects his own family, and the various charities of his day. He has no concern for his loyal employee, Bob Cratchit. For this reason, Scrooge is despised by many in his community. In the end, the impossible happens. Scrooge changes and the people in his world benefit. You know the story line.

It is Christmas Eve and the world is anticipating the great day. Everyone is excited about Christmas, except one person, Ebenezer Scrooge. He is hard at work. He believes the annual celebration of Christmas is a humbug! Surrounded by a world of people, Scrooge is living in isolation. He rejects the Christmas carolers. He rejects the local United Way and rejects anyone in need. He even rejects his own nephew's, Fred's, invitation to dinner. To make matters worse, he tries to make his loyal employee, Bob Cratchit, feel guilty for celebrating Christmas. There is no other way to say it. At the beginning of the story Ebenezer Scrooge is a dark character. He would have remained a dark character if it wasn't for his deceased business partner, Jacob Marley. He died on Christmas Eve seven years earlier. It is he who arranges the visits of three guests. There was the Ghost of Christmas Past. Scrooge is forced to visit his childhood school and his days as an apprentice. There is the Ghost of Christmas Present. Scrooge is forced to hear what others are saying about him. There is the Ghost of Christmas Future. Scrooge is forced to watch others celebrate his death and he is forced to visit his own grave. Marley arranges their visits for one reason, to change Scrooge, and change he did. Scrooge didn't miss Christmas. The ghosts worked their magic in one night. With a full heart, Scrooge wakes up on Christmas morning and embraces the day. He celebrates Christmas and begins to live a new life, a better life. As Charles Dickens writes, *"He became as good of a friend, as good of a master, and as good of a man, as the old city knew, or any other old city, town, or borough, in the good old world."* *A Christmas Carol* reminds us that change is possible. If you believe that change is possible, say, **Bah Humbug!** If you like change, then you are in the minority. Did you know that 80% of Americans hate change? Ours is not the first generation to resist change. It has always been that way.

On January 31, 1829, President Andrew Jackson received a letter from the Governor of New York. The topic was a new invention that was changing America: the railroad. This is part of the letter:

"As you know, Mr. President, 'railroad' carriages are pulled at the enormous speed of 15 miles per hour by 'engines' which, in addition to endangering life and limb of passengers, roar and snort their way through the countryside, setting fire to crops, scaring the livestock and frightening women and children. The Almighty certainly never intended that people should travel at such breakneck speed."

**Martin Van Buren
Governor of New York**

Eight years later, the author of that letter, Martin Van Buren, was elected the eighth President of the United States. This is the point: Ours is not the first generation to resist change. There have always been people who resist change. This is the question I have always asked myself:

Why do people resist change? There is no simple answer. There are as many answers as there are people. Psychologists tell us there are up to fifteen different reasons why people resist change. On that list is the fear of the unknown and fear of losing control. Sometimes people don't change because other people in their lives encourage them not to change. That is often disguised as love. That is why we tolerate the bad-behaving people in our lives. We tolerate the abuse because we get something out of the bad behavior. We feel needed, or we like the role of martyr. Sometimes, we encourage people not to change because it covers up our own imperfections. For example, I knew a young person who went to church camp and experienced Jesus. When she came home she told everyone about her new love for Jesus. Her mother told her to stop talking about Jesus because she didn't want her daughter to look like a nut. This is the truth. The mother wanted her daughter to stop talking about Jesus, because the mother had never experienced Jesus.

Sometimes we don't change because we just don't want to change. That was the story of Scrooge. He didn't want to change. He didn't see the need to change. Like a worn pair of jeans, his old ways had become comfortable. It is the rest of the world that has a problem, not us. That is the case for most of us. The problem is, change, or transformation, is at the very heart of the Christian faith. That is the point of discipleship. If you are going to be a little more like Jesus every day, then you must change. If that makes you think, say, "**Bah Humbug!**" That leads us to the the next question.

What causes people to change? Isaac Newton's First Law of Motion says, *"Everything continues in a state of rest unless it is compelled to change by forces impressed on it."* In other words, change doesn't just happen. It happens because some external things happen to us. Sometimes, we change because of something negative. We see that all the time. Our society believes in negative reinforcements. That is why you get a ticket when you speed. That is why you pay a fee when your library book is late. That is why we punish our children when they do something wrong. Sometimes the fear of something negative will change us. That is my story.

Several months ago, I went to my doctor for my annual physical. Part of my annual physical was a battery of blood tests. When I sat down with my doctor, he said I was quite healthy, except for one thing. My blood work showed I was leaning toward diabetes. That was not music to my ears. I have worked with many diabetics through the years and I know diabetes effects every organ in your body. My father discovered he was a diabetic when he was about my age. In the end, diabetes complicated his story. In the future, I don't want it to complicate my story. My doctor said, if I took some weight off I could prevent the disease, so I started counting calories. As of two weeks ago, I have lost sixteen pounds and my blood work looks better. I did not take off the weight because I am vain, or I am fishing for a compliment. I tell you my story to underscore my point; fear changes us. The fear of diabetes, a negative, changed me. Sometimes, we change because of something negative. That was Scrooge's story. He

didn't want to live eternity in torment, so he changed. If you agree negative things change us, say, "**Bah Humbug**" Sometimes, positive things change us too. That takes us to this morning's scripture lesson.

We find ourselves today in the twelfth chapter of Romans. Do you remember what I said about Romans last week? It is Paul's theological masterpiece. Today's scripture reading is close to my heart. When I was in school, I wrote it on index cards and thumbtacked it on bulletin boards. I read it a million times, "*Do not conform to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*" Those words both challenged me and inspired me to be a better person. Those words called me to tap into my potential and use all the gifts that God had given me. During those days, I saw those words in academic terms, the renewing of my mind. Today, I see those words as so much more. Today, I understand the great sacrifice Jesus made for me. Jesus died on the cross to save me. If I don't change, then Jesus died in vain. If I really love Jesus, then I must change. Anything short of being like Jesus isn't good enough. I must change and live a life that is worthy of Jesus. And so must you. Sometimes, positive things change us.

On August 2, 2010 Ryan Arnold died. He was thirty-two years old. He left behind a wife and two small children. He did not die because he was doing something wrong; he died doing something right. He was donating part of his liver to his brother, Chad, who was suffering from a rare liver disease. Two days after the surgery, Ryan had a heart attack. Two days after the cardiac arrest, he died. It is a tragic story. The only positive part of the story is that Chad lived. One of the many reporters asked Chad, "How do you live knowing your brother died because of you?" He responded, "I am trying to live a life that is worthy of my brother." Does that sound familiar to you?

How do we live knowing that Christ died for us? The answer is simple. We must live a life that is worthy of Jesus. That means we must be open to change. What is it about your life you need to change to be more like Jesus? Do you remember the words of George Bernard Shaw? He said, *Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.* "And all of God's people said, "**Bah Humbug!**"

To watch the movie clip from *A Christmas Carol*, paste the following Youtube link address in your browser:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iV5aUDAa7pU&feature=youtu.be>