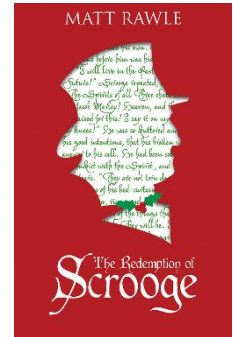


The Redemption of Scrooge

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Week 3



OPENING PRAYER

God of today, bless our time together as we discuss how you are at work in the here and now. As we consider how you are at work in our world today and in our Advent and Christmas celebrations, let us be mindful of your will and of what you call us to do and be. In the name of the Holy Spirit, who is present with us always. Amen.

VIDEO STUDY AND DISCUSSION

In *A Christmas Carol*, the Ghost of Christmas Present takes Ebenezer Scrooge through the town where he lives. Rawle writes of what Scrooge sees on this tour: "The houses look bleak, as the wintry weather seems to emphasize the chilly disposition of everything he sees. It is not that the streets were full of squalor; rather the grayness of it all left little room for good tidings and the usual cheerfulness we have come to know during the holiday season" (*The Redemption of Scrooge*, page 86). Despite this, there was still an air of happiness on the streets. Dickens wrote, in *A Christmas Carol*, "There was nothing very cheerful in the climate or the town, and yet was there an air of cheerfulness abroad that the clearest summer air and brightest summer sun might have endeavored to diffuse in vain" (Stave Three).

- Are there areas of our city that strike you as bleak? How much time have you spent in these parts of the city? _____

- How have you seen hope and cheerfulness amid the bleakness in this part of town (or in another place you've visited)? _____

The Ghost of Christmas Present takes Scrooge on a tour of several Christmas celebrations. Most notably, the ghost and Scrooge look in on the meager Christmas dinner at the Cratchit house. Bob Cratchit sees something different around his table than the rest of us. "Have you ever seen such a goose?" Cratchit says. Dickens writes, "Its tenderness and flavor, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration" (*A Christmas Carol*, Stave Three). Bob Cratchit sees something different, and if we take the time to look at the gospel story, we might see God's story that is lying just below the surface.

To understand and appreciate how God is at work among us, we have to adopt the attitude of Bob Cratchit and look beneath the surface of what seems to be going on in our lives.

Think of a meal that you had recently that was filling and nourishing but that most people might not regard as a "nice" meal.

- Would you normally consider the meal you described a blessing? Why, or why not? _____

- What blessings in your life do you have a tendency to overlook? _____

- How might our attitudes and behaviors change when we take the time to be grateful for all that God has blessed us with, even those things that we take for granted? _____

Rawle writes, "It is easy to get distracted with the decorations, lights, and festive music of Christmas; but at its heart, the first Nativity is a story born out of poverty, where scarcity is transformed into abundance by a God who will stop at nothing to be with us" (The Redemption of Scrooge, page 97)

- How is the Nativity story "born out of poverty"? _____

- The angels revealed the good news of Jesus' birth not to kings and lords but to shepherds. Why do you think God chose shepherds? _____

- What does this tell us about God and how God works? _____
- How should the circumstances of the first Christmas influence our observance and celebration of current-day Christmas? _____

In A Christmas Carol the Ghost of Christmas Present shows Scrooge that Tiny Tim is very ill and will likely die. Scrooge is horrified by the thought, especially because he realizes that his words and actions are partially responsible for Tim's deteriorating condition. God often works through human beings, and our words and behaviors can have a bigger impact than we'd ever imagine.

- How have you seen God at work through human beings? _____

- How has God work through you? _____

RELATING THE STORY TO SCRIPTURE

Exodus 16:13-21 - That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. 15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, "It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. 16 This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Everyone is to gather as much as they need. Take an omer[a] for each person you have in your tent.'"

17 The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. 18 And when they measured it by the omer, the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Everyone had gathered just as much as they needed.

19 Then Moses said to them, "No one is to keep any of it until morning."

20 However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them.

21 Each morning everyone gathered as much as they needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away.

- What does this Scripture say about how God provides? _____

- What does this Scripture say about God lifting up the lowly? _____

Luke 15:1-10 - Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

3 Then Jesus told them this parable: 4 "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6 and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' 7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

8 "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

- What does this Scripture say about how God provides? _____

- What does this Scripture say about God lifting up the lowly? _____

- How are God's actions or words in this Scripture at odds with how human beings typically understand justice? _____

CLOSING PRAYER

God of the present, open our eyes to all the ways you are present in our world, particularly the ways you are at work through other people. Open our minds so that we can learn from those who embrace blessings that we take for granted. We pray these things in the name of your Holy Spirit, who is with us always. Amen.