

## The Redemption of Scrooge 2: Jesus, the Redeemer of Our Past

12/10/2023

Scriptures: Psalm 51:1-17; Matthew 4:18-23

### Christmas Quiz

This morning we continue our worship series, *The Redemption of Scrooge*, by thinking about the past. To start, I'd like for us to take a short quiz, to see how well you know the Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth:

Question 1: Which Gospel accounts record the birth of Jesus?

- a) all of them
- b) Matthew, Mark, and Luke
- c) Matthew and Luke
- d) none of them

Question 2: Which Gospel mentions wise men from the east?

- a) Matthew
- b) Luke
- c) Matthew and Luke
- d) neither Matthew nor Luke

Question 3: Which Gospel mentions the little drummer boy?

- a) Matthew
- b) Luke
- c) all of them
- d) none of them

Let's see how you did. The correct answer to question 1 is that only Matthew and Luke record the details of the birth of Jesus. Mark's Gospel opens with a description of John the Baptist, and then immediately goes into the account of the Temptation of Jesus – already as an adult. John's Gospel gives a synopsis of the Creation – with Christ, the Word of God – present and actively involved with the creation of the world, and then jumps into background information on John the Baptist, and how John saw Jesus.

Question 3 is made up – there's no little drummer boy in any account. It's a from a movie from the 1950's to sell some guy's Christmas song that he had written in the 1940's. In regards to question 2, the wise men are mentioned in Matthew's Gospel. Often we combine the events of Matthew and Luke's account into one big story. This shows us that our memory isn't always right. Even our Bible knowledge can be misremembered!

Sometimes our memories are hard to trust because they're faulty. That's why when there's an automobile accident, officers want to talk with people

involved, or those who witnessed the crash, as soon as possible after the event – so it's still fresh in their minds. And, because our memories are from our points-of-view, they are our perceptions. They're not necessarily the complete picture of the event that's being remembered. These inconsistencies can be confusing, and can cause us, like Scrooge, to become stuck in the past.

This morning I want to turn in Matthew's Gospel to the past, where he records how Jesus called His first disciples. If you have a Bible or Bible app, turn with me to Matthew 4:18-23. I'm reading from the New International Version today. **Read Matthew 4:18-23.**

### **The First Disciples**

When Jesus called His first disciples, He didn't show up at Herod's palace. He didn't go to Pilate's barracks. He didn't even go to the chief priest, or the Temple, saying, "Here I am boys!" "As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen," (Matt. 4:18).

We find Jesus, walking along the edge of the lake. He sees these two brothers, who happen to be fishermen. Maybe it was a family business. One of those cases where, "My grandpa was a fisherman, my dad was a fisherman, I'm a fisherman, and my son's going to be a fisherman." People tend to do that with careers, it seems. Simon and Andrew were making a living catching and selling fish.

Then Jesus turns everything upside down. "'Come, follow Me,' Jesus said, 'and I will send you out to fish for people,'" (verse 19). Instead of catching fish; Jesus calls Simon and Andrew to catch people – to bring them into relationship with God through Him. Notice what the brothers do. "At once they left their nets and followed Him," (verse 20).

Pay attention to what happens next in Matthew's Gospel record. "Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Him," (verses 21-22). In this case, the brothers are part of a family fishing business, and they leave their dad right there holding the net, when Jesus extends His call to follow Him to them.

### **Fishermen**

I've known a few fishermen in my life. Sometimes they can talk pretty rough – especially when the "big catch" gets away! Jesus knows our pasts, and invites us to join Him anyway. In our passage this morning, we hear Jesus call

ordinary, sometimes rough people – like you and me – to drop what they're doing, and follow Him. He doesn't show up and say to the chief priest, "Hey, holy man, come follow Me." He calls these rough, tough, fishermen guys, who we know probably were not at the top of their "game" with regards to holiness, or even a relationship with God for that matter.

What does Jesus do with these less than perfect guys? "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people," (verse 23). He doesn't call the perfect – He perfects those He calls. Luke's Gospel puts it another way. Luke records that Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor," (Luke 4:18-19).

In Dickens' classic book, *A Christmas Carol*, Ebenezer Scrooge comes face-to-face with the Ghost of Christmas Past. Scrooge is confronted with the memories of his own past. He's reminded of who he once was. Some of those memories are good – playing with friends in the streets as a young boy, while others are painful, like when his fiancée calls off their engagement because Scrooge is more focused on money than on her.

### **On the Path to Redemption**

The ability to acknowledge and remember his past puts Scrooge on the path to redemption and transformation. Sometimes Christmas can be a painful time of year for people. Past mistakes or losses may often come to mind amid the cheer of the season. The thing we must remember is that Jesus Christ came to earth to redeem us – and when He redeems us, He also redeems our past losses and mistakes.

The disciples responded to the call of Christ. They left their nets, boats, and their families. In similar fashion, the Ghost of Christmas Past in Dickens' story prompts Scrooge to confront and let go of the chains of his past – chains that have bound him to a life of greed, isolation, and misery. The call of Christ compels us to leave behind those things which also hinder our journey with Him.

He knows our faults, our pasts – just like He knew David's sin with Bathsheba. When confronted, David repented. He poured out his heart to God – that's what the Psalm was we heard this morning – and he was willing to do things God's way so much so, that we're told that "God testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after My own heart; he will do

everything I want him to do,” (Acts 13:22). Jesus invites us to join Him on the journey even when we’re trapped in the net of sin of our own design.

### **Jesus Redeems Us**

Accepting His call doesn’t make us perfect – it means that through Christ, we will remember that He redeems every aspect of our lives and transforms us so that we’re able to accept God’s love, and share in His work in the world. As we reflect upon the call of the first disciples, and the lessons learned from the Ghost of Christmas Past, let’s remind ourselves of our own encounters with Jesus – those moments that have called us to leave behind the familiar and the comfortable, and embrace the transformative journey of faith. What is holding you back today from accepting Christ’s redemption of your past?

He wants to do that for you. Like Scrooge, looking at our pasts can be painful – but to grow in grace – we must offer our past to Jesus and accept the work He’s already done for us on the cross. Only then can we leave behind the nets which entangle us, and embark on the journey to live in the freedom He offers us through His love and grace. Church, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever,” (Heb. 13:8) – He is our Hope!

**Prayer:** God of Christmases past, You have been at work in our lives since the beginning. Open our eyes to all of the ways that You have been at work in our memories and in the Advent and Christmas traditions which have been handed down to us. Give us the courage to examine mistakes we’ve made in the past so that we will continue to grow into the people You have called us to be. In Jesus’ name. Amen.