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JOY - RADICAL REDEMPTION

"He was a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner." When greeted with "Merry Christmas!" the sad self-contained soul spat out, "Bah! Humbug!" Then he encounters the three spirits of Christmas: past, present, and future. He becomes convicted of his wayward life.

Finally, he cries out in repentance, "I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The spirits of all three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons they teach." His resulting joyful and remarkable transformation reveals that Ebenezer Scrooge has become spiritually alive - a genuine Christian conversion. Radical redemption.

Dickens writes, "He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man as the good old City knew. It was always said of him that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us! As Tiny Tim observed, "God bless us, every one!"

1 - A first lesson of Scrooge is the **JOY** of "Christmas past." This is the incarnation of Christ, God come in the flesh. God sent His only Son to be born of a virgin, to fulfill His promises of a Savior. An angel proclaims the miracle in Luke 2:10, "**Behold, I bring you good news of a great JOY that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**"

Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Jesus is the divine God-man who lived a perfect life so He could die a perfect death and pay the penalty for sin, so that all who believe in Him receive His resurrection life. That's breathtaking **good news** because God doesn't command us to save ourselves. He announces not an exhortation to change ourselves, but an invitation to be changed by Him! That's a miracle too!

So, learn to LIVE in the JOY of Jesus - who saves you from your sin. Don't let your past define you. Jesus makes everything new. Scrooge was transformed from a selfish old miser. Mankind became his business. He joyfully and earnestly looked after the needs of others, putting their interests ahead of his own.

2 - A second lesson of Scrooge is the **JOY** of "Christmas Present." This is the indwelling of Christ. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And all who believe in Him as Savior and Lord are re-born by the Holy Spirit. In Jesus, God fulfills His promises of the New Covenant. "**I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you.**" (Ezekiel 36:26). This is a miracle of "radical redemption."

So, learn to LOVE others in the JOY of the good news about Jesus. You experience JOY when you live it out as J-O-Y... **J**-esus first, **O**-thers next, **Y**-ourself last. You do this because Jesus lives in you and through you - so you can reach others for Him. The "church" is not a place you visit on Sundays, the "church" is God's people who go out, to show and tell the good news about His radical redemption.

3 - A third lesson of Scrooge is the **JOY** of "Christmas Future." This is our inheritance in Christ. Jesus miraculously came in the flesh in the past as Emmanuel, "God with us" to save us. Jesus lives "with" and in us in the present. And one day He will come again to take us to live "with Him" in His presence forever.

Hebrews 9:15 says Christ "**is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.**" This will happen when Jesus comes again. Advent refers not only to the first coming of Jesus, but also to His second coming. And that's what we're waiting for!

So, learn to LOOK forward to future JOY - to Christmas Yet To Come, which lasts forever. Hebrews 9:26 says "**He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him.**" Jesus keeps His promises.

Are you ready? You are, if you have received radical redemption. If you have believed in Jesus as Lord and Savior, then you are saved (*past*), you are being saved (*present*), and you will be saved (*future*). And you, like Scrooge, can honor Christ in your heart - and keep Christmas all the year.

May God bless you, every one!