

The Spirit of Christmas as Seen in Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol

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The famous novella A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens captures the spirit of Christmas in a memorable way. The story presents Christmas in a past-present-future timeline.

At the beginning of the story set in 18th Century London we are told of the certainty of the death of Jacob Marley the business partner of Ebenezer Scrooge. Marley was dead as a door nail. And the story begins exactly 7 years after his death on Christmas Eve.

Charles Dickens takes us to Scrooge's dark, chilly office on this cold evening. It is getting late. Scrooge, a miser, warns his clerk Bob Cratchit not to put more coal on the fire or keep looking at the clock. At this moment Scrooge's nephew Fred comes in and greets him saying, A Merry Christmas Uncle. Scrooge in response says Christmas is humbug. Fred replies that that Christmas is the time of the year when people truly open their hearts to each other with kindness and love. Fred leaves after inviting Scrooge to join their family for Dinner on Christmas Day.

Scrooge is then visited by two gentlemen collecting money for the poor. They are sent away without being given anything. He tells them to send the poor to the prisons. Scrooge tells his clerk Bob Cratchit that saying Christmas comes only once in a year to have a day off is "a poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December." He is warned to come early the day after Christmas.

Scrooge then leaves for home. From here the real drama starts. Scrooge is first of all visited by Marley's ghost which came after all the bells in the house rang loudly for a minute or so at night. This ghost had a chain around him which was full of cash boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds and heavy purses wrought in steel. The ghost said that this was a chain he made for himself in life because he looked after business well instead of the true of business of looking after people with love and mercy. The ghost warned Scrooge that his chain was much heavier by now. He further told Scrooge that he still had a chance to escape a tragic end and have hope for change. He was told that he will be visited by three more ghosts.

At the disappearance of Marley's ghost Scrooge falls asleep.

Charles Dickens now paints for us the arrival of three ghosts—the Ghost of Christmas Past, the Ghost of Christmas Present and the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Be. The encounter with these three ghosts gives a chance to Scrooge to travel through memory lane. The scenes of Christmas he is shown shake him up. He is so afraid that he truly desires to change.

In fact, A Christmas Carol focuses on this one thing about Christmas—change. It focuses on repentance and tears that help a man mend his ways. It shows us how change comes to the heart of a miser Ebenezer Scrooge.

As we come back to the story of Scrooge, he is now visited by the Ghost of Christmas Past. The ghost radiates with light and Scrooge begs him to put his cap on which can conceal the light. The ghost is angry at this suggestion. We are reminded of the words of Jesus who said, "Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil." The ghost carries Scrooge to his native place. Scrooge is shown his own childhood when he delighted in stories, was kind and innocent. But most of his childhood

was lonely. He is reminded of his tender relationship with his sister who died young leaving behind his nephew Fred. Then there is a lovely scene of Christmas where his first employer Fessiwig hosts a Christmas party which Scrooge and his fellow apprentice enjoyed to the full. The generous attitude of Fessiwig is in marked contrast to the miserly attitude of Scrooge in the present. A final scene is that of the parting between Scrooge and his fiancée. She ends the relationship with him because she understood that Scrooge had fallen in love with a golden idol which is money. She parts by saying she will always remember the kind person that Scrooge once was. We are also shown how this lady is happy with her husband and children on Christmas Eve. Some of these scenes lay the groundwork for the change to happen in Scrooge's life. He sheds a tear now and then. He remembers how he had rudely reacted to a boy singing carol that evening and also how he did not treat his clerk Bob Cratchit in a fair manner. Tired by the scenes he saw, Scrooge falls asleep again.

Now the second spirit, the Ghost of Christmas Present who holds a glowing torch makes his appearance. He carries Scrooge to different places. The ghost is seen blessing the dinner and the houses of the poor especially and Scrooge wonders why the poor are treated with such special care. One highlight is the visit to Scrooge's nephew Fred's home and Christmas party. It is a happy family and Fred speaks of his uncle with pity. Scrooge is then shown Bob Cratchit's family feast. They are full of joy and the special focus is Tiny Tim, the youngest in the family who is ill and needs crutches to support him. Bob comes home carrying Tiny Tim on his shoulders and tells his wife that Tiny Tim was saying in church that it would be good for people on Christmas Day "to remember the One who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see." The Ghost informs Scrooge that Tiny Tim will soon die if their circumstances do not change soon. Even though the mention of Scrooge's name casts a shadow on the party,

the scene ends with Tiny Tim saying, "God bless us every one." Before disappearing the ghost shows two ugly looking children namely Ignorance and Want. When Scrooge expresses concern for them, the ghost quotes Scrooge's own words: "Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?" On hearing his own words Scrooge hung his head in shame.

Soon the clock struck the hour. And a dark-looking ghost appeared. It wore a black robe which hid its head, face and body; only the hand could be seen. Scrooge trembled with fear. The ghost did not speak but only nodded his head and pointed its finger. The Ghost of Christmas Yet to come showed him scenes of Christmas one year later. Someone had died. He was a wretched man. Scrooge is unable to find himself in the crowd that moves around. The dead man's charwoman and laundress and the local undertaker steal his bed curtains, his bedsheets and even his shirt and trades it to Old Joe for money. All this time the dead man lay, in the dark empty house, with not a man, a woman, or a child, to say that he was kind to me in this or that! Scrooge did not have the courage to move the sheet that covered the dead man's face. The Ghost shows Scrooge a man rejoicing because of the dead man as he got a little more time to pay off his debt. The Ghost also showed Bob Cratchit and family mourning the death of Tiny Tim. As the Ghost and Scrooge move past Scrooge's office, he runs to the window only to see someone else seated on the inside. But the Ghost's hand was pointing in another direction beyond an iron gate to the graveyard and to a neglected corner in it. There Scrooge sees his own tombstone.

Scrooge realizes that he himself was the dead man. He cried out to the Ghost, "Why show me all these if I am past all hope. Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life.'

He further prayed saying, "I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year." When he saw his own death; the man who a day ago said Christmas was humbug is now ready to honour it and keep it all the year. Here is a lesson Charles Dickens is reminding us. Christmas is not just a season or time of the year. True Christmas happens when the true spirit of love and joy and peace the Christ child brings will be with us throughout the year. True Christmas celebrates the sacrificial generosity of God who so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son Jesus to bleed and die on the cross for the sins of all mankind. And that is good news of great joy to all the people who honour Christmas in their hearts all the days of the year.

Scrooge awakens on Christmas morning. Realizing that he still had a chance to make amends he laughed. It was the father of a long, long line of brilliant laughs. He shouted, "A merry Christmas to everybody" once he checked with a boy in the street on what day it was. He is wonderstruck that within a night his life was changed.

And the change in him was permanent. He spent the day with Fred's family and sent the best Turkey in town anonymously to Bob Cratchit. He raised the salary of Bob the very next day, and became a second father to Tiny Tim, who did not die. He went to church on Christmas Day and promised the gentlemen who had earlier called at his office a substantial amount of money to help the poor. The miser Scrooge had now become a generous man in line with the true spirit of Christmas. His life now reflected Apostle Paul's comment on change that Christmas brings: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come." As far as Scrooge was concerned, the old had gone and the new had come indeed!