

# The Promise of Hope

## Hope Forthcoming

### Introduction

Do you realize that the Bible actually speaks of two Christmases? Just as in the Bible, prophets in the past foretold of the Christmas we celebrate today – The coming of Jesus. So the Scripture tells us of another Christmas in the future. One where Jesus will return. However, unlike His first, Jesus' second coming will not be veiled and of little fanfare.

Hark the Herald Angels Sing: "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity."

**Revelation 12:5 (NKJV) — 5** She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.

At this coming, He will part the Eastern sky for all the world to see. And this time, He will be bearing a sword. The question that each of us must answer is on which end of that sword will we find ourselves. Will the arrival of Christmas Yet to Come be one of celebration or desperation? Charles Dicken's helped us to consider this question through the ...

**ILLUS:** Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come (Future)

Only a short time after the Ghost of Christmas Present passes away, Scrooge is visited by the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come.

Dicken's depiction of this ghost is the darkest of all. It has no face, only a dark ghoulish figure of gothic influence. So ominous that he refers to the ghost as a specter or phantom. This ghost is a depiction of the grim reaper – a personification of death.

Interestingly enough, whose first appearance in literature was in devotional text from 1841 (just two years before Dickens wrote A Christmas Carol) that details the life of a Christian.

Of this spirit Scrooge said, "I fear you more than any specter I have seen."

It was then this silent, faceless spirit took Scrooge on a journey that was imminent but still "yet to come."

In the original the journey began at the London Stock Exchange where men were joking over only going to someone's funeral if there were free lunch. In the Jim Carey version, a chase then begins through the streets of London as Scrooge runs from the carriage of death drawn by horses. He then falls into the home of his maid who is talking to her husband about taking the goods that had been discarded of a dead rich person. Scrooge then begins to see that this might be his life (or death as it were). He is then taken to his room where there is corpse lying under a sheet but he is too afraid to remove the sheet in fear of it being him.

He then asks, "Spirit, if there is any person who feels emotion caused by this man's death, show that person to me I beg you." Then it shows two people who are relieved by the man's death because they are no longer fearful of being evicted by their landlord."

Scrooge then demands, "Let me see some tenderness connected to death, or this chamber will forever haunt me!"

It is then we are returned to the house of Bob Cratchit where people are mourning the death of Tiny Tim, yet still hopeful – even in the face of death. Bob said in the midst of his crying, "I'm alright. I'm quite at peace." And he is immediately whisked away to a cemetery before a tombstone of which snow is obscuring the name. The wind blows the snow revealing the name Ebenezer Scrooge.

It is here that Scrooge asks the climatic question, "Are these shadows of things that **WILL BE** or shadows of things that **MAY BE?**"

And he begins a defense, "Men's courses in life foreshadow certain ends, but if these courses are departed from, these ends will change. Isn't that so?"

As his name is revealed he cries, "No! Am I that man who lay upon the bed? No. Spirit, hear me! I'm not the man I was. Why show me this if I'm past all hope? Assure me that I may change these shadows you've shown me."

It is then the date of his death is revealed as December 25.

He begins sinking into the grave, he begs. "Spirit, I will honor Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year. I will not shut out the lessons of the past, nor present, nor future. Oh spirit, please tell me I may sponge away the writing on that stone!"

Then he falls into a casket under lit by what appears to the be glow of fire deep within the earth.

This doesn't sound too Christmassy does it? That is why so many people do not care for A Christmas Carol. In light of our perception of Christmas this seems so out of place. But is it? Or could it be that Dickens actually confronts us with the reality of Christmas?

At the first Christmas the perspective of people concerning the coming of the Christ was varied. Some were excited, some were astonished, some were curious, some were enraged, some were threatened, some were indifferent, and some flatly rejected Him. In whatever case, they continued on with their lives.

However, at His second coming, while there will certainly be people who experience all of these emotions, the difference is that no one will just be able to continue on with their lives. On this second Christmas, regardless of one's emotions, everyone will be separated into two groups: those who have received the Spirit of Christmas and those who have rejected the Spirit of Christmas.

This is the dichotomy that Dickens presents to us through Scrooge's interaction with the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. The question you must answer is when you face the encounter with death, will it be one of Hope Forever Lost or one of Hope Forthcoming?

## Hope of Death Forthcoming

Does this not strike you as out of place at Christmas? In our time yes. But not in the time that Dicken's wrote A Christmas Carol. For the Victorian era, Christmas was not only a time to celebrate Christ's birth, but also a time to remember those that God had separated out and had

passed on before. Jesus spoke of separation by the reapers through The Hope of Death Forthcoming in the parable of the Wheat and the Tares.

**Matthew 13:24–30 , 36-43 (NKJV) — 24** Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; **25** but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. **26** But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. **27** So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ **28** He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ **29** But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. **30** Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’ ... **36** Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.” **37** He answered and said to them: “He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. **38** The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. **39** The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. **40** Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. **41** The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, **42** and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. **43** Then

the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

**Revelation 6:8 (NKJV) — 8a** So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him ...

## Hope of Redemption Forthcoming

“Why show me this if I’m past all hope? Assure me that I may change these shadows you’ve shown me.”

This last of the ghosts, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come gives Scrooge the final chance a redemption.

Remember that Dec. 25 was the day of his death.

“What’s today my fine fellow?” “Well, its Christmas Day!” “I haven’t missed it.”

**Isaiah 55:6 (NKJV) — 6** Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near.

**1 Thessalonians 5:2 (NKJV) — 2** For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

**Revelation 19:11, 13, 16 (NKJV) — 11** Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war ... **13** He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God ... **16** And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS

**2 Peter 3:9 (NKJV) — 9** The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

“Joy to the world the Lord is come.”

## Hope of Reconciliation Forthcoming

Scrooge makes his way to Christmas dinner and says to his nephew Fred, “I’ve come to dinner if you will have me ...”

**2 Corinthians 5:18–20 (NKJV) — 18** Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, **19** that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. **20** Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.

The Real Christmas Dinner – will not be with a turkey but with the Lamb

**ILLUS:** MacArthur

Rev 5: The Lamb slain

Rev 6: The Lamb who breaks the seal

Rev 7: The Lamb of Salvation

Rev 8: The Lamb of Trumpets

Rev 12: The Blood of the Lamb Overcame

Rev 12: The Lamb slain before the foundation of the world

Rev 14: The Lamb standing on Mt. Zion

Rev. 15: The Song of the Lamb

Rev 19:

**Revelation 19:7, 9 (NKJV) — 7** Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." ... **9** Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."

Rev 21: The Bride of the Lamb

Rev 22: The Throne of the Lamb with no more curse and seeing His face!

Behold, I am coming quickly – Even so come Lord Jesus!

## Hope of Eternal Life Forthcoming

But this hope is not limited to Christmas Yet to Come, but can be in Christmas Present. Dickens was trying to help us see that if it can be true for Scrooge, it can be true for you!

**2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV) — 17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.



**ILLUS:** Scrooge – making merry and singing with carolers and giving to the poor.

**John 10:10b (NKJV) — 10b** ... I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

Death still comes for us all, but for the believer it is just a shadow. (Yea, though I walk through the shadow of death) This was true of Jesus, and because of Him, it can be true for you.

**John 11:25–26 (NKJV) — 25** Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. **26** And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

## Conclusion

So, often when we think of and celebrate Christmas, we do so picturing only a baby in a manger in Bethlehem. Rarely do we envision Christmas through the lens of Jesus’ death. But that is the very reason that He came.

The manger was always in the shadow of the cross.

Even the wise men through their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh acknowledged Jesus death. And each of the gifts pointed not to that first Christmas but the Christmas yet to come.

Scrooge: “Let me see some tenderness connected to death”

Shadows that will be and shadows that might be

In A Christmas Carol, Dicken's confronts us with the reality that the celebration of Christmas must include the reality of death – both Jesus' death and ours.

"It was said of him, he knew how to keep Christmas well."

Can that be said of us? Can it be said of you?

If you are here, it is not too late?

**Hebrews 10:23–25 (NKJV) — 23** Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. **24** And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, **25** not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

The Promise of Hope at Christmas and at Christmas Yet to Come.

Immanuel: God with us – the One who was and is and is to come.