

December 04, 2011
The Light Of Christmas For Your Dark Days
John 12:46
Rev. Jean Smith

This is such an exciting time of year, is it not? But for many people it is a difficult time of year. The weather has turned cold and the darkness comes so early which makes for long evenings shut up inside trying to keep warm. How many of you like to drive around and look at Christmas lights? I enjoy all the Christmas lights. The extra lights help to chase away the darkness. Here we are in the darkest time of the year and we have Christmas lights to dispel the darkness and bring us hope.

Light was certainly an important part of the very first Christmas. The angels of the Lord dazzled the shepherds with a light show like they'd never seen before and they were filled with the message of hope and hurried off to Bethlehem to see the newborn Savior. Then there was the light of the star over Bethlehem that led the wise men to Jesus.

Light is certainly a major theme throughout the Bible. In 1st John 1:5 it says, *"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."* The first command God gave in creating the universe was, *"Let there be light."* (Genesis 1:3) Jesus came into the world and He proclaimed, *"I am the light of the world."* (John 8:12) He is the reason we light up Christmas - as a way of proclaiming that Jesus is the light of the world. While it is true that Christmas has become completely secularized and materialized for a vast number of people, that doesn't change the fact that **Jesus is the light of the world**. It just means we, as Christians, need to be more careful not to get it confused in our own heads. We light up Christmas because Jesus is the light of the world. He is the One who came down from heaven to chase away the darkness in our lives. Jesus said, *"I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer wander in darkness."* (John 12:46) He's not talking about physical darkness. He's talking about personal spiritual darkness, and that kind of darkness is every bit as real.

Everyone has dark days - days when you just don't feel like getting out of bed, days when you just don't feel like you have the strength to face the challenges of life, days when you just want to crawl back under the covers and pretend the world doesn't exist. We all have dark days from time to time.

This morning I want us to look at **FOUR TYPES OF DARK DAYS** that come our way and then we'll look at how the light of Christmas dispels our darkness.

THE FIRST KIND OF DARK DAYS ARE THE DARK DAYS OF DISAPPOINTMENT. Remember Job in the Bible. He was a man who knew the darkness of disappointment. He said, *"I hope for happiness and light but trouble and darkness come instead."* (Job 30:26) Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever hoped for something good but disappoint and heartache came instead?

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Disappointment is all around us. There are many people disappointed with the Steelers for not being able to beat the Patriots. Some of our disappointment is much more serious. Things don't always work out the way we think they should. Situations don't always go the way we want them to go. Life can be very disappointing at times. When disappointment is prolonged we end up in the dark days of disappointment.

THE SECOND KIND OF DARK DAYS ARE THE DARK DAYS OF DISTRESS. This is when we're overwhelmed and stretched beyond our limits by the circumstances of our lives. When we're in the dark days of distress we don't know what to do. The situation seems hopeless. We don't see any help in sight.

David, in the Bible, experienced the dark days of distress. He said, "*I cry desperately for help but it still does not come.*" (Psalm 22:1) Have you ever felt that way? When you were so distressed you didn't know where to turn or what end was up? My guess is that some of you are under tremendous distress right now. You're in the dark days of distress. Maybe it's concern for a loved one, maybe it's a broken relationship, maybe it's a health issue, maybe it's a financial problems or a decision you have to make that's weighing heavily upon you.

Unfortunately there are some people who live their lives in a perpetual state of distress, always looking to the people around them to rescue them and yet they refuse to take the steps to get unstuck. That makes it hard on the rest of us when we are in distress and overwhelmed. We don't want people to think of us that way, like the young boy who was standing at the entrance to a department store at a mall. He had gotten separated from his mother and he was standing there crying. Several people walking by handed the boy some money, which he liked, but still he continued to cry. The store manager came up to him and said, "Don't worry, son, I think I know where your mother is." The little boy whispered, "I think I know where she is too, but don't tell anyone." We don't want anyone to think we're capitalizing on our distress and so we hold it in. Nor do we want to be seen as weak. Sometimes we hide our distress because we've been so disappointed in the past by those we trusted to help us. That only made matters worse.

When you're in real distress, it takes a lot of energy to hold it in and pretend you're ok. It's exhausting and draining. It's a desperate place to be when you're in the dark days of distress.

THE THIRD KIND OF DARK DAYS ARE THE DARK DAYS OF DOUBT. John 12:35 says, "*The one who walks in the dark does not know where he is going.*" He's groping around, stumbling in the darkness.

There are times when we look back over our lives and we feel disappointment. There are times when we look at our current situation and we feel distress. And then there are times when we think about the future and we're filled with doubt. Will my health hold up? Will my job last? Will my income be enough? Will my children or grandchildren turn out alright? Will my loved ones be safe? These are things that threaten to overwhelm us with doubt. That's when we need someone to lead us out of our doubt, someone who knows the way.

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A man was traveling home one night when the fog became so thick he couldn't see ten feet in front of his car. He could barely see the road. He was creeping along, just about to give up and pull over when he spotted two faint taillights on the road in front of him. He thought: "Thank God, I'll just follow this guy and he'll lead me out of this mess." That seemed to be working when all of the suddenly the car he was following made a sharp turn and then stopped. Then the lights on the car disappeared altogether. Next thing he knew there was a tap on his window so he rolled down his window and said, "What's wrong? Why'd you stop?" The man he had been following said, "Well sir, this is my driveway." Sometimes we're in such dark days of doubt that we're willing to follow anyone in hopes of getting out. But that doesn't always work.

The dark days of disappointment, the dark days of distress and the dark days of doubt, if unrelenting, will often lead to the **FOURTH KIND OF DARK DAYS, THE DARK DAYS OF DEPRESSION**. That's when everything seems to cave in. All light has gone out of your life. That's when you're not just in a fog but you're in complete darkness.

When Hitler was raging through Europe, Winston Churchill said, "**The light has gone out of Europe.**" Some of you may be feeling like the light has gone out of your life right now. Solomon felt like that when he wrote, "***The thought of my pain is bitter poison. I think of it constantly, and my spirit is depressed.***" (Lamentations 3:19-20) The dark days of depression have been around for a long time. I would imagine some of you have faced dark days of depression. Maybe you've lost a loved one or had some serious health problem. Maybe you've lost your job or had a financial failure. Maybe some of you are in the dark days of depression right now and the holidays only intensify your pain. Maybe you feel like David when he said, "***Lover, friend, acquaintance - all are gone. There is only darkness everywhere!***" (Psalm 88:16) When you're in that kind of situation it's easy to wonder if anyone really cares. Please hear this if you hear nothing else today - God cares deeply about you. You matter deeply to God. God sees your pain. He wants to help you out of it.

The truth is - everyone here today is in one of three places. Some of you are headed into dark days right now. You don't know it yet, but that's what lies ahead for you and you're going to soon find that out. Some of you are experiencing dark days right now, as we speak, and it's not much fun. Some of you have just come through some pretty dark days and you're still trying to recover. You may heal up just in time to experience them again.

So where do you turn when you're in the dark days? Who do you turn to? After going through the dark days of depression, King David sang a song of praise to God. In it he sang, "***You Lord, are my light; you dispel my darkness.***" (2nd Samuel 22:29) How does God do that? How does he dispel our darkness? He does it through the light that came to earth on the very first Christmas. When Christ came into the world, taking on human flesh, he proclaimed to us, "***I am the light of the world.***" (John 8:12) He came in order to light up our dark days. How does he do that? How does he light up our dark days?

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FIRST, GOD ENCOURAGES YOU WHEN YOU ARE DISAPPOINTED. Psalm 34:18 says, *"The Lord is near to those who are discouraged, he saves those who have lost all hope."* The first thing God does to dispel the darkness of your lives is to let you know He is there. He is right there with you, walking beside you and sometimes even carrying you through difficult situations. That's the message of Christmas - Emmanuel, God is with us! We don't have to go through our dark days alone. He is there in the dark days to strengthen you and lead you out of the darkness. He has a plan for your life, a purpose for your existence. *"The plans I have for you," says the Lord, 'are plans to prosper you, not to harm you, to give you hope and a future.'"* (Jeremiah 29:11)

C. S. Lewis said, "Pain is God's megaphone." God uses the pain in our lives to get our attention, to make us listen up. Pain is like God waving a red flag. He wants us to stop and listen to what He has to say. He's there in the dark days and He will speak to you if you listen. He will speak through His Word. He will speak through godly friends and family members. He will speak to you in the most unexpected ways if you will listen. He will speak words of encouragement to you in midst of your darkness.

SECOND, GOD STRENGTHENS YOU WHEN YOU ARE DISTRESSED.

One of the greatest verses in the Bible reads, *"I can do everything through Him [Christ] who strengthens me."* (Phil. 4:13) There isn't anything God is going to ask you to go through that He will not give you the strength you'll need to go through it. He promises us this His strength. We can insist on going through the dark days of distress in our own strength, but if we do we will end up a casualty of distress. But if we turn to God for strength, He will strengthen us. Do you want to be competent and capable and successful in handling the dark days of distress, then don't try to do it in your own strength. Do it in God's strength by calling on Him to fill you with His power. The trouble is we think we don't need God. We think we can do all things in our own strength. We get it into our heads that we are supposed to do it in our own strength. Proverbs 16:18 says, *"Pride goes before a fall."* Don't make the mistake of thinking you can face the dark days of distress all by yourself. Ask God for help. Ask Him to fill you with His strength.

THIRD, GOD GUIDES YOU WHEN YOU ARE FILLED WITH DOUBT. When you're confused and you don't know which way to turn, God is there to guide you. *"Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world. So if you follow me, you won't be stumbling through darkness, for I will bring light to your path.'"* (John 8:12)

What are you struggling with? What are you worrying about? What are you in the dark over? What keeps you awake at night? What keeps your stomach churning? Eventually you're going to have to make those important decisions you've been putting off. How are you going to decide what to do? Are you going to rely on your feelings? Feelings can be misleading. Like Scruge said, emotions can't be trusted because they might just be from "a bit of undigested meat." Are you going to go with the crowd and do what everybody else is doing? That's not always very reliable either. Who are you going to turn to for advice and guidance? Do you have someone you can go to who will never steer you in the wrong direction? The answer is yes. God

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is always there to guide and direct you through the dark days. The Psalmist said, "*Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and light unto my path.*" (Psalm 119:105) As you read God's Word, pray for the Holy Spirit to bring the light of understanding. Don't even try to read God's Word in your own strength.

FOURTH, GOD CHANGES YOU WHEN YOU ARE DEPRESSED. God has the ability to take your broken heart and your broken life and fill you with His marvelous light. He changes you at the core of your being, from the inside out. The trouble is we desperately cling to our old familiar ways and refuse to give ourselves over to God to be changed - to be made new. He wants to heal us. He wants to fill us with His light, but we cling to the familiar darkness, afraid to trust Him. But if we will trust Him and surrender ourselves to Him, He will fill us with marvelous light. The Apostle Paul proclaims to us, "*You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of the light... producing the fruit of goodness, righteousness and truth.*" (Ephesians 5:8 & 9)