

The Light of Christmas in Dark Times

John 1:1-5

Intro

One of my favorite parts of Christmas is the lights. It seems that Christmas lights up the world. The first lights go up in the November season when the stores begin to put up their lights -- those who want to get a head start on the buying season. Then next the town lights go up. Then neighborhood lights start going up. Then we put up our lights.

Lights were important in the first Christmas. The angels did the dazzling light show in the sky and the shepherds went to Bethlehem as a result and saw the baby Jesus. The wise men saw another bright light in the sky, a star and they followed it to where the Saviour was born.

Light is a major theme in the Bible. The Bible says in 1 John *"God is light and in Him is no darkness at all."* The very first command that God gave in creation was, *"Let there be light."* Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world."* This is the very reason for Christmas.

John 12:46 *"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.'" He's not talking about physical darkness here. He's talking about personal darkness.*

Everybody has dark days. You don't want to get out of bed. You're afraid to face the world. You don't feel like it's worth the effort. You just want to throw in the towel. You don't want to see anybody. We all go through dark times in our lives.

4 TYPES OF DARK TIMES

I want us to look today on 4 types of dark times and how Christmas is the response to that through the life of Jesus. Sometimes there are dark times of disappointment, distress, doubt, and depression. You probably can relate to at least one of those.

1. Dark Time of Disappointment

Job 30:26 *"I hope for happiness and light but trouble and darkness came instead."* Have you ever felt that way? Hoping for one thing but was disappointed.

There's been a lot of disappointing news just lately in our society and world. The economy, terrorist threats, illness and disease. Life is disappointing sometimes. Things don't always work out as planned. Situations don't always work themselves out.

I imagine Mary experienced disappointment in the very first Christmas. She has been told that she was to bear the Messiah, the Son of God. And she gives birth in a stable. I think that would be disappointing. Not in the Holiday Inn, not in the Hilton. She has the baby in a stable. Life is disappointing sometimes. We go through dark days of disappointment.

2. Dark Time of Distress

That's when you feel overwhelmed, when you're stressed out, stretched to the limit, frustrated. You've got too much to do and you don't have enough time, you don't have enough money, you don't have enough energy.

Mary probably felt distressed in the very first Christmas. In the first place, she was 9 months pregnant and she had to ride a donkey from Nazareth to Bethlehem which would have been 104

kilometers. It probably took them 9 days to travel. That would be stressful. She has the first baby she's ever had by herself, alone in a stable with Joseph and the animals. That would be stressful.

My guess is that some of you are in dark days of distress right now. You may be stressed out financially. There's too much of the month left over and you're running out of money for Christmas. You can be stressed out physically. Your get up and go has got up and went. You don't feel good and you don't feel like doing anything. You get stressed out physically.

You can be stressed out relationally. Your marriage isn't working out right. Your relationships aren't working out right - with your kids, your family, your friends, your boss. When your expectations in a relationship aren't met you get stressed.

3. Dark Time of Doubt

John 12:35 *"The one who walks in the dark does not know where he is going."* He's drifting; no clear objective. Do you ever lose your way? Do you ever feel like your head is in a fog? When you look at your past you get disappointed. When you look at your present, you get stressed. When you look at your future, you get doubtful and you worry.

The fact is there are plenty of reasons for us to have doubt and uncertainty as we finish 2018 and begin 2019. Will the economy take care of itself? Will it turn around? Will I have a job a few months from now? Will I be in good health?

Dark days of doubt. The one who walks in the dark doesn't know where he's going. Have you ever felt like that? What does my future hold? Where am I headed? You're in a fog.

When you have a dark time of disappointment and a dark time of distress and a dark time of doubt then comes a dark time of depression.

4. Dark Time of Depression

That's when everything seems to cave in. When you're depressed you feel like, "What's the use?" You feel like giving up.

Some of you may feel that the light is fading in your life. Lamentations 3:19-20 *"the thought of my pain is bitter poison. I think of it constantly, and my spirit is depressed."* Perhaps some of you faced a crisis or a problem during this year. Maybe it was a divorce, a death of a loved one, a defeat, maybe you got laid off, or maybe you faced a major illness.

The fact is you don't feel like being happy at Christmas time. When you're in that kind of situation, you wonder, "Does anybody care?" If you don't get anything else, get this: God cares. He cares about you because you matter to Him. Your pain matters to Him and He cares about it.

What's the answer? In 1 Samuel 22:29 we read, *"You Lord, are my light; you dispel my darkness."* How does the Lord do that? He says, *"I'm the light of the world."* He came to light up our dark days and times. How does Christ dispel the darkness? How does He light up my life? Well, let me share with you 4 things that Christ wants to do in your life

HOW CAN CHRIST DISPEL MY DARKNESS?

1. He encourages me when I'm disappointed.

Psalms 34:18 *"The Lord is near to those who are discouraged; he saves those who have lost all hope."* The first way God encourages us is He says, "I'm with you." *"The Lord is near"*-- He's not left you. Some of you had tough times this year. Maybe 2018 was a disappointing year. You didn't get the job you thought you were going to get. You didn't get a raise. Your health failed you or whatever.

Where is God in all that? He's where He's always been. He hasn't left you. Immanuel – *God is with us!* He encourages me in disappointing times by reminding me, I never go through anything alone. He is with me. The darkest part of the night is when the light shines the brightest. He's with me.

He encourages me by helping me realize He's got a plan, and a purpose for my life. We read in Jeremiah 29:13, *"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."* Underline "hope" and "future". God says, "I don't want to hurt you." I want to help you. I created you. I have a future and a hope for you.

God uses disappointments to get our attention. It's like a red flashing light. He wants to say to those of you who have been through disappointing experiences recently, "Yes, you have had pain and problems. But my purpose for your life is far greater than the problem that you're facing and there is a purpose behind it." He encourages me when I'm disappointed.

2. He strengthens me when I'm distressed.

Philippians 4:13 (Amplified version) says, *"I have the strength for all things in Christ who empowers me. I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him who infuses inner strength into me."* Some of you need to put this verse on your refrigerator. *"I have the strength for all things..." I'm ready for anything and equal to anything."* I am capable and I am able to handle no matter what comes my way. Is it on my own power? No! It's with the power that Christ gives me. He will strengthen me when I'm distressed.

Psalms 23:4 *"Even though I go through the deepest darkness, I will not be afraid, Lord, for you are with me."* The darkest part of the night, that's when the light shines the brightest. There are 150 Psalms in the book of Psalms. The theme of Psalms in one sentence: ***"Life is tough, but God is good."*** That's the theme of Psalms.

There are 365 *"fear nots"* in the Bible. That's one for every day of the year. God is saying "Don't be afraid. I will strength you when you're distressed."

3. He will guide me when I'm doubtful.

Sometimes we can be confused and don't know which way to go. In John 8:12 *"Jesus said, 'I am the Light of the world. So if you follow me, you won't be stumbling through darkness, for living light will flood your path.'"*

What are you worried about? What has got you uptight? What is it that is keeping you awake at night, keeping your stomach churning? Perhaps you're going to have to make some important decisions for 2019.

When you face doubts, there is a reliable source that you know will always give you the right advice and never steer you in the wrong direction. Is there any place in the world you can get that kind of advice?

Yes. It's called God's word. It won't steer you the wrong way. *"Your words are a lamp to light the path ahead of me and keep me from stumbling."* It is the only reliable guide for life. It's a light. It illuminates. It keeps you from stumbling, helps you to see things clearly.

4. He will change me when I'm depressed.

Did you know that when you get depressed, God doesn't want to just pat you on the back and say, "Cheer up!" He wants to change you. In fact, He wants to use the depression to help you learn some new attitudes, new thoughts, and new approaches. He wants you to change. He can change you. He says, "Don't drive out the darkness, just turn on the light."

Ephesians 5:9 *"The light produces in people all that is good and right and true."* When the light of God shines in on my life, it brightens me up and it takes me out of that pit of despair and the light of God fills my life and I start glowing, I start being a bright person shining out. When you allow Christ to fill your life with His Spirit, it brings out the best in you. Christ dispels the darkness in my life. He is the light.

Conclusion

This Christmas, you may feel overwhelmed. Maybe you're going through one of these dark times. It could be the dark time of disappointment, of distress of doubt or depression. The good news is because of Christmas, there is now a light in the world that can drive away that darkness.

1 John 2:8 *"The darkness in our lives disappears and the new light of life in Christ shines in."* It shines in our lives!

When I think about the first Christmas, it's amazing about the star the wise men saw and followed it from the east. I'm sure many other people saw it. It was in the sky, anybody could see it. Probably millions of people saw that bright unusual light. But they didn't do anything about it. But wise men followed the light. That's why they were wise! It's one thing to know there's a light in the world. It's another thing to follow the light.

The point is that you can choose darkness or light. You can choose to live in the dark nights of the soul or you can choose to live in the light of Christ. God shines the sun on everybody. But you can go live in a dark cave. It's your choice. If you want to get out of the dark days, then you must choose to start living in the light. That's your choice.